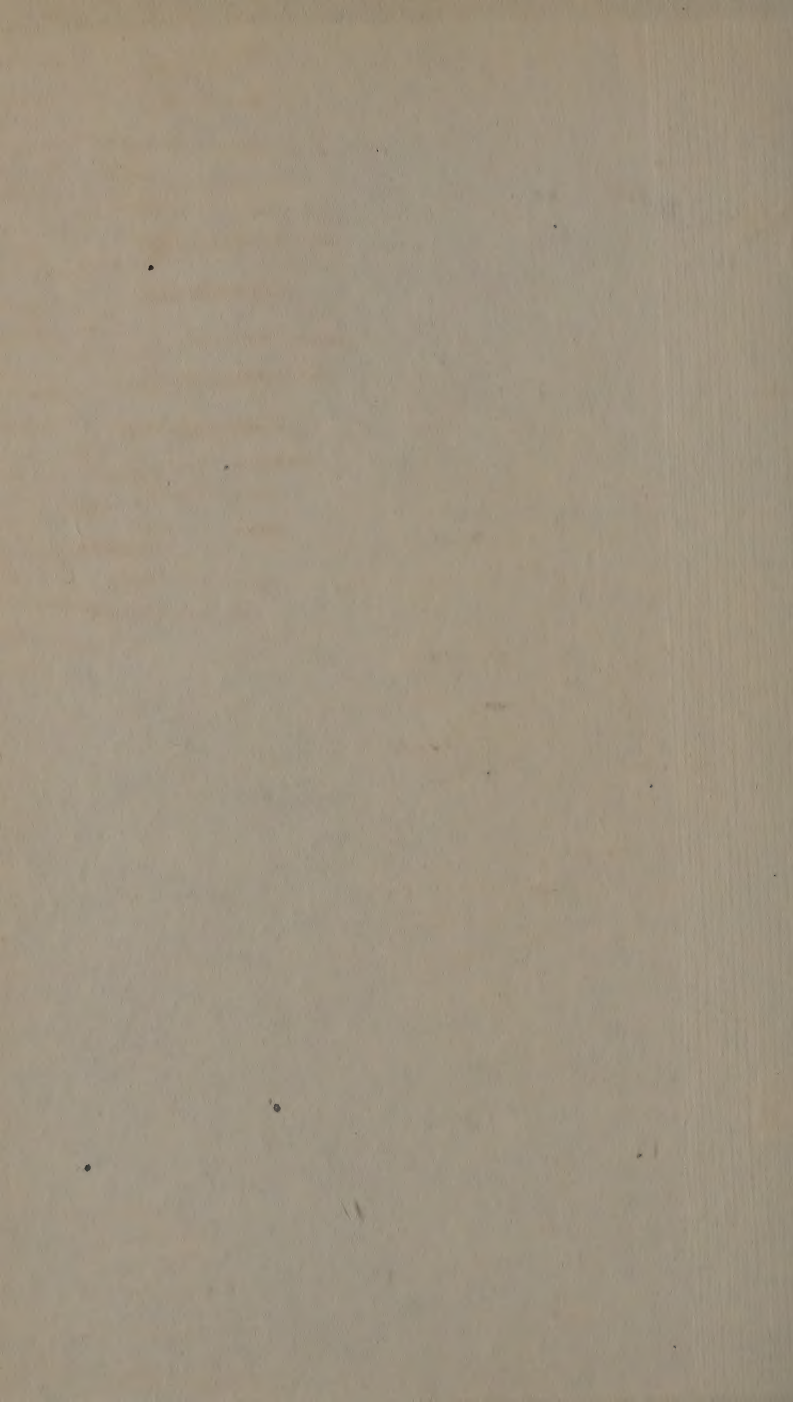




A DIPLOMAT OFF DUTY



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by

The Honourable
SIR FRANCIS LINDLEY
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Drawings by
RIDLEY
BORCHGREVINK



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" This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise ;
This fortress, built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war ;
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands ;
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
Fear'd by their breed and famous by their birth,
Renowned for their deeds as far from home,
For Christian service and true chivalry,
As is the sepulchre in stubborn Jewry
Of the world's ransom, blessed Mary's Son ;
This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land,
Dear for her reputation through the world."

P r e f a c e

THE diversions of a diplomat may be of almost any kind ; for his profession affords him unusual opportunities for cultivating the most varied hobbies. If he fancies collecting, whether it be works of art, curios, or any other product of the skill and ingenuity of man, he can ransack Eastern bazaars and Western side streets at his leisure ; not scurrying through them as must tourists, but making friends with the adversary squatting amongst the wares or standing behind the counter, and even actively co-operating with him in an emergency to bamboozle some other customer. He has time to lay far-sighted plans for the acquisition of the desired object at a price within his means ; and I have known a colleague enlist a number of confederates to disparage and offer a derisory price for a coveted carpet at intervals during several months on end ; until at last the dealer let it go, no doubt at a handsome profit, but much cheaper than my friend ever expected to get it. Such are the nicer moves in an absorbing game ; and it is no wonder that nearly every diplomat is something of a collector, if only in a mild way.

If a man has more serious tastes, he will never be long without exceptional chances of indulging in them. The musician will be able to discuss with long-haired foreigners the merits, and especially the demerits, of rival composers and vocalists ; and will be in a position to judge of the respective attractions of Asiatic and European scales and instruments. The philologist will be in his element, wandering at will amongst the languages and dialects of the world, and attuning his ear, as he never could at home, to cadences of speech only to be learned from those uttering their mother tongue. The student of pictures

and of all manner of art can view at his ease the masterpieces of mankind, and trace the influence of ancient civilisations and alien traditions on the productions of his own time and country. The archæologist has often the most enthralling discoveries brought, so to speak, to his very door; and can supplement his book learning and museum-acquired knowledge by examining *in situ* relics which have only just seen the light of day. Nor must we forget the philanderer, to whom "la carrière" opens ever-receding horizons and unrivalled opportunities for widening his experience and practising his time-honoured arts.

Finally, if his bent is literary, our diplomatist has every occasion to follow it. He can without obtrusiveness cultivate the society of men of letters in the country where he temporarily resides, and enlarge his stock of ideas and enrich his vocabulary by studies in the vernacular. Not a few active members of the Service have embellished our libraries with works of fiction and biographies of merit; and two, at least, have added masterpieces to the language in the field of political geography and of manners. I refer to "Turkey in Europe" and "Hajji Baba of Ispahan." Memoirs are the close preserve of those who have retired; and even the most captious must admit that the crop of these which we owe to diplomatic pens are not only interesting and informing, but are free from the blemish of bad taste, which is the hall-mark of so many post-war works from other quarters.

The distractions set before the reader in this book are not of the kinds mentioned above; and the writer does not even hope to appeal either to literary critics or to serious students of any subject. His predilections have led him to spend most of his spare time in the open air; and these pages are addressed to those who take an interest in outdoor pursuits. The public are prone to believe that diplomats are a strange breed

—revelling in secrets and cyphers, and bereft by their profession of the national characteristics with which they started their career. This book may dispel some of those illusions and show that a diplomat is a very ordinary mortal ; though whether that is to be desired or not is another matter. I really do not know whether we gain or lose by the halo of mystery we wear so modestly. In any case those who hold that there is no place like England and no people to compare to the English should read with an indulgent eye the work of one who, having seen and appreciated many countries and races, is entirely of their opinion. The inspired words put into the mouth of old John of Gaunt by England's greatest son have not been chosen without intention for the opening quotation.

It is customary in a preface to acknowledge help received from others. This book would not have been begun but for the gentle persuasion, or shall I say iron determination, of my wife, who accompanied me on all my travels, except in Persia and Korea. It would hardly have been continued without the encouragement of my eldest daughter. The happier of the quotations at the beginning of each chapter were chosen by my second daughter. The chapter on bathing was written at the suggestion of the third, backed by the clamorous approval of the fourth—both notable exponents of the art of swimming. The illustrations are from the hand of Mr Ridley Borchgrevink, a young Norwegian artist, whose work would lend distinction to any book. Three chapters appeared in part in *The National Review* in 1913, and could not have been published without the kind authorisation of the Editor. Finally, the permission of the Foreign Office was necessary to publish a book dealing, however unpolitically, with countries in which the author had served officially. To all these persons and authorities I hereby tender my best thanks.

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CHAPTER I

WHERE IS IT ?

"Then the whining school-boy, with his satchel,
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school."

A WANDERING life entails the loss of many small possessions which disappear without apparent cause ; sometimes on the occasion of a change of residence, but often during a temporary absence. The compensation corresponding to this disadvantage is to be found in the unexpected re-appearance of some treasured object long believed to be hopelessly lost. Thus a book of field-notes regarding birds, which I had kept off and on since 1888, disappeared at Petrograd sometime in the first year of revolution. Let me hasten to add that no suspicion rests on the Bolsheviks for this loss. There is no reason to believe that the book was "nationalised" by anyone ; nor has any pecuniary claim for compensation, for what was a priceless possession to its compiler, been lodged at the Foreign Office. The loss had been far from forgotten, but to some degree written off, when, ten years later, a thin little volume bound in tattered black morocco, bearing on the outside in stamped letters of tarnished gold the legend "Where is it ?" suddenly obtruded itself from a number of forgotten and dusty books. This volume contained the bird-notes made during the years 1887 and 1888. After the latter year it had been considered unworthy of

its office and been replaced by the larger and more pretentious volume, the loss of which had been so grievous that it had driven out all recollection of its humbler predecessor.

The book was intended for an address book ; and the pages were cut and lettered so that each name could be found at once under its appropriate letter of the alphabet. A schoolboy of fifteen has no urgent need of an address book for his friends ; and, looking back, I cannot but think that I must have possessed an unusual feeling of the fitness of things to have chosen such a book for setting forth the doings of the birds which were then my passion. It was seriously done, too, with all the gravity of the typical schoolboy. On the left-hand page is to be found the specific name of the bird in question, together with a terse description of where its nest is to be met with. On the right-hand page is the generic name ; and, underneath, the dates on which nests of the species have been actually found, and an indication of the locality and number of eggs in the nest. In some cases further details are added ; while in others the entries are more scanty.

The letter "A" must have been rather a puzzle ; but it would never have done to have left the first page of the book blank. The trim and sober-clad hedge-sparrow, or dunnock, saved the day under the pompous appellation of *Accentor*, a name by which I should never have dreamed of calling it save in such an extremity. So there stands "*Accentor*" on the right-hand page, and on the left one the simple word "*Hedge*." And immediately above this word is the illuminating sentence, "In box trees, hedges, or bushes." Under the word "*Accentor*" are to be found the following entries : "1887, Apl. 14. 2 young ones, 1 egg. Do., Bird sitting on eggs. April 17. Nest

just ready for eggs." The amusing part of the whole business is the general definition of where hedge-sparrows build ; and it is difficult to guess for whose benefit the information is given. I had found dozens of hedge-sparrows' nests before 1887 ; and nothing more unlikely could be conceived than that I should forget where to look for them. It may be that the description was given in reply to the question staring at me from the cover of the book ; but it is more probable that it was due to the working of the scientific spirit, to a vague desire to impart knowledge of value to posterity, and as proof of the seriousness of ornithological study. At any rate there stands the entry on the first page : " In box trees, hedges, and bushes." And no bad definition either for anyone who may wish to look for the prettiest of blue eggs in one of the neatest and most charming nests which it is possible to see.

I cannot say that I can remember where these hedge-sparrow nests which I found in 1887 were actually situated ; but in the case of more notable finds every detail stands out fresh after forty years. The letter " W " comprises all the warblers and wag-tails, and not a few other birds, amongst which is " woodcock." These birds were, rightly or wrongly, thought to be rare breeders in England in 1887, and I shall never forget the moment when, right at my feet amongst the dead oak leaves in a copse in the New Forest, I first caught sight of the large, luminous eye of the sitting bird. " Here is a woodcock sitting on its nest," brought my incredulous companion hurrying to the spot ; and how we gloated over the beautiful mottled eggs. This happened in 1886, and the entry in the book must have been ante-dated. It runs as follows : " 1886, June 3rd, Lyndhurst. The old bird sat so close that I touched her with my stick before

she would move off the nest." No mention is made of the fact that there were four eggs in the nest ; or that their successful blowing in an exceedingly hard-set condition was a surgical operation of which, at that time, I was inordinately proud—however shameful I may consider it now. All this had become to us a part of history indelibly impressed upon our minds. But the touching with the stick was a detail not previously sufficiently accentuated, and it had to be placed on record for fear of oblivion.

There are two other entries under the heading "Woodcock." The first reads : " March 25, 1887. Observed one in New Forest at Brockenhurst." During the two years I kept this book I do not seem to have " seen " anything. Birds were invariably " observed " ; and the use of the shorter and more colloquial word was banished as effectually from my notes as it has been for the last twenty years from my official correspondence with various Secretaries of State. The second entry runs : " May 12, 1887. I put up two old and one able to fly at Lyndhurst." The careless reader might consider this sentence a trifle obscure ; but field ornithologists should be free from the epistolary restraints properly imposed on arm-chair naturalists. Of course the old birds could fly, otherwise the fact would have been noted. The point was that the third, naturally a young one, was able to fly on May 12, 1887. My lost book contained details of a much more notable flushing of woodcock a good many years later, but very near the same spot in the New Forest. I don't remember the date, but one of the old birds got up a few yards off and flew away carrying a chick below its belly. That woodcocks carry their young is, of course, a well-known fact, though there has been much correspondence as to the manner in which they do it. On this occasion the

general appearance of the bird, as seen from behind, reminded me of a sparrow-hawk carrying off a small bird. We found either two or three of the remaining nestlings—I cannot remember which.

A bird whose nest is extremely difficult to find is the stonechat; and it was always a favourite object of search, because it is such an early breeder. It usually nests amongst the thick herbage round the bottom of furze bushes, but in this position the nest is almost impossible to find unless the bird is flushed from it. I never succeeded in finding one in such a place; and the description in the book of where the nest should be sought reflects my experience: "To be found at Hursley and embankment"; and on the opposite page, "1886, April 11 and 15. In bank." This record must, too, have been inserted the next year; but how well I remember finding those two nests in the bank bordering the broad grassy lane which used to run from Hursley village to the kennels. At the age of fourteen I thought the stonechat a very rare bird, and its nest was seldom found by rival collectors. To find two nests within a week—both with eggs—was indeed a feat.

The Easter holidays fall too early, as a rule, to offer many attractions to the bird's-nester; but there is one epoch-making entry made during them under the heading "Tit, bearded." It runs as follows: "1887, April 12. At Surlingham, in Alder Carr, 3 eggs, observed birds." There are some further details as to the position and composition of the nest. Now the bearded tit is an extremely local bird, though not rare in its regular Norfolk haunts. I am inclined to think that it has increased since 1887; but, in any case, we almost lost our breath when we saw it for the first time in our lives that day in a dyke running out of Surlingham Broad. We had often gloated over its

picture in bird books ; and it was impossible for us, who knew all the commoner marsh birds well, to mistake the aristocratic bearing and distinguished shape and colouring of our new friend. My brother jumped from the rocking boat without a moment's hesitation, and sank in the cold water and mud nearly to his middle. There was no reason to suppose a nest was in our immediate vicinity ; it was full early for one, and the birds had not been flushed, but were flitting unconcernedly amongst the reeds uttering their metallic note. Yet by an extraordinary turn of fortune he at once found the nest in the dead sedge amongst the alders where he landed. That was the crowning achievement of the whole season.

These entries—and there are two hundred and eleven separate “ observations ” recorded in the little book—call back so many memories that one could soon weary any reader. There is the barn owl. “ May 14, 1887. Hole of tree, St Cross, three eggs.” No mention of the anxious chiselling at the hole, perched precariously on the shoulders of a particularly tall companion, who nearly thirty years later was lucky to return with his Yeomanry whole from the Dardanelles. No record of the supreme moment, when the frightened bird drew blood from my knuckles as it left the hole and nearly dislodged me with terror from the swaying shoulders of my supporter.

Two entries under the heading, “ Brown Owl,” are unusual. “ May 11, 1888. Bought young one for a shilling, about three weeks old, Kingsgate Park,” reveals a pecuniary transaction which had rather a melancholy sequel. The bird was kept by us in old Wolvesey Palace, and fell into a bucket of tar the very day the Emperor Frederick of Germany died. It survived the ordeal and, I believe, finally escaped. The date of the accident is fixed in my mind, because

a grown-up person called attention to the tact displayed by the bird in going into mourning on the day ordained by the Court. "Sept. 27, 1887. Hit one in Crab Wood." This must have been on a reprehensible catapulting expedition shortly after the end of the summer holidays. The bird, no doubt, was uninjured and flew away, but one does not often hit a brown owl with a catapult. On the same day and in the same wood I "observed" two young wood-pigeons unable to fly. This is a late date to find squabs, and is of more interest.

"May 3, 1887. Fishers' Pond incubated," records a tramp of six miles to the charming lake mentioned, followed by a deep wade into the mud to rifle the nearest coot's nest. No sooner were we out of the water than the sounds of men coming through the wood produced an indescribable panic. We never knew whether the intruders were really keepers or whether they pursued us; but, like a beaten army, we dashed through the brushwood regardless of thorns and bruises and held on for a good mile without a check. The wonder was that the precious coot's eggs, one of which reposed in each trouser pocket, were unbroken. Few people know that this pocket is a good place to carry a largish egg.

Encouraged, or possibly warned, by this adventure, I had the effrontery a year later to write to the owner of Fishers' Pond, a complete stranger, for leave to fish for pike. The gentleman in question, with characteristic good nature, readily granted it; and two of us set off on foot one November morning immediately after breakfast. At that time Saints' Days were whole holidays at Winchester; and I think it must have been on 1st November, All Saints' Day, that this expedition took place. My companion, though no fisherman, was a boy of parts. He was the

best mathematician, the strongest swimmer, the finest tree-climber, and the biggest eater in the school ; and, like most boys of this type, was the son of a country parson. When we reached Twyford we stopped at the inn to order tea, and I had the greatest difficulty in reducing the order to fourteen poached eggs with bacon to match. Arrived at the bank of the pond, I put up my rod and, almost at the first cast of the spoon, hooked and landed a four-pound jack. When, a minute or two later, I had another run, we began to discuss whether a dogcart ought not to be hired to take our catch home. The cost, which was a vital consideration, would be covered by the sale of the fish. As a matter of fact, we had not another touch all day, and had no difficulty in carrying our four-pounder ourselves. Having disposed of the whole of the tea ordered in the morning, we caught sight of two small College boys struggling along the muddy road on tricycles as we emerged from the inn. Nothing would do but we must race them the two and a half miles home, and we beat them handsomely.

I suppose I must have felt that the book would be incomplete unless it contained some general information for the use of future generations, for the last five pages are given over to this purpose. The first of these pages contains a list of rookeries in the vicinity of Winchester. St Cross, Kingsgate Park, Twyford station and village, Marwell Hall, Morstead, and Sir Thomas Fairbairn's are the names on this important list ; and I can only hope that the rookeries still exist and give their present owners as much excitement as they gave to us during the weeks when the young rooks offered themselves as targets to our catapults.

The next page is headed : " Walks for an afternoon." Note the word " afternoon," to show that these nearby localities are no fitting object for a Saint's Day's

expedition. Perhaps Wykehamists may like to see the list.

Amphitheatre woods beyond and round.

Fishers' Pond and woods round.

Otterbourne.

Crab Wood.

Owlesbury quarry and woods.

Woods beyond Twyford.

Hursley.

Copse beyond Morstead.

Gorse beyond butts.

Chilkhams copse by church and home by Longwood and downs.

I wonder if kestrels still nest in the exposed roots of the big oak standing on the very edge of Owlesbury quarry. You could see the handsome tawny eggs if a companion held your heels and another one his heels and you let the blood run well to your head three feet below the edge. But such was the overhang that you could not reach them without a rope; and there was the oak placed just right to hitch it round.

The next page contains a list of inns, or rather places where refreshments could be had. No doubt I attached great importance to this list, as a properly planned Saint's Day was impossible without one fixed point for a good meal—nearly always tea.

Twyford by station and Dolphin.

Hursley. King's Head.

Otterbourne. Rising Sun.

Morstead. Licensed dealer.

Lyndhurst by the station.

Brockenhurst by the station.

Pitt, licensed dealer nearly opposite pond.

Owlesbury. Cricketers' Arms near mill.
Halfway Inn on Southampton Road.
Past Fishers' Pond on road as well.
On Arlesford Road.

Some of these descriptions scarcely serve the purpose for which, presumably, they were intended. "Pitt, licensed dealer nearly opposite pond," is particularly cryptic; and I wonder upon what pond the worthy Mr Pitt kept his ducks. I suppose it was Fishers' Pond, as this was to us "the" pond. The last entry but one actually mentions this pond—also mysteriously. "Past Fishers' Pond on road as well" might confound a man well acquainted with the neighbourhood; for, if memory serves, there are two roads near the pond—one running along the open side of it, and another parallel with, but a little distance from, the end. I suppose my harbour of refuge was on this first road.

And so come the last two pages of the little book. They contain a list of thirty-six birds with the localities within reach of Winchester where their nests might be found. This must have been the confidential part of the book, and it was probably only shown to one or two boon companions. The information was entirely the precious fruit of personal experience and only to be used oneself.

Crab Wood was a very large wood in those days, but conceive the mortification of meeting a rival party there some May afternoon on account of one of them having seen the entry, "Jays, Crab Wood." Or imagine the vexation of arriving at Second Pot, as we called one of the disused locks on the old canal, confident of finding a reed-warbler's nest, possibly with a cuckoo's egg in it, and discovering a couple of boys, perhaps from another house or even from

college, hot on the scent because they had caught a glimpse of the words "Reed warblers below second pot. Hell. Otterbourne river." No! No! These two pages of the book are emphatically not for publication, and I have already divulged far too much about them.

Much is written nowadays about the tyranny of games at public schools, and, presumably, it exists. There was none at Winchester in the eighties; and any moderately resourceful boy could employ most of his spare time as he liked. Nor did any stigma attach to his doing so; and, if he could not hope to aspire to the position held in public esteem by a first-class cricketer or footballer, his pursuits in no way barred him from the full measure of popularity to which his human qualities otherwise entitled him. During the five years I was at Winchester I only once came into collision with the games authorities. It was at that time the custom for the Captain of the Eleven to send out his minions the day before a half-holiday and "nail" a sufficient number of unfortunate juniors to act as umpires on the following day in the principal matches. On one occasion only was I nailed, and that was the day before a certain Thursday on which I had planned a bird's-nesting expedition. We had secured leave off lunch and were to be out in the country from eleven in the morning till six, or possibly eight, in the evening. A glorious day, in fact. It never occurred to me to give up this excursion; and I succeeded in finding a boy in another house, even more impecunious than myself, to act in my place for the sake of half-a-crown. My substitute never turned up, and I was summoned before the Captain of the Eleven on Friday and tunded—that is to say, beaten with an ash stick across the shoulders—for failing to act as umpire. I must add that the cricket potentate,

who was an excellent fellow, enjoyed the joke of my having paid half-a-crown to be tunded, and his blows were simply a matter of form. This "nailing for umpire" was an abuse; but it was a fagging, and not a games-tyranny, abuse.

The great freedom we were allowed at Winchester was not abused, unless bird's-nesting and catapulting can be called abuses. Certainly in these days of easy locomotion, collecting birds' eggs is not a thing to encourage; and it is legitimate to doubt whether it should have been encouraged forty years ago. The boys who practised it were so few that the masters were probably right in considering at that time that the many advantages of long days spent in the country, for boys who really enjoyed rambling, outweighed the damage done to the stock of birds. Catapulting was, of course, severely condemned by authority; but the ardent bird's-nester of the spring and summer was liable to degenerate into an accurate catapult in the autumn and winter. Botany is the thing for boys with country tastes; and I often regret that a passion for birds made me consider botanising but a dull amusement. I was confirmed in this prejudice by the fact that my father had inherited my grandfather's taste for botany; and, at the age of fifteen or so, I took it as axiomatic that only the dullest subjects interested parents.

I have strayed away from the "Where is it?" into platitudes very alien to its spirit. For the thumbbed and dingy old volume speaks to me only of the varied English countryside—the rich water-meadows threaded by crystal chalk streams, the whispering reed beds of the Broad, the copses and spreading woodlands floored blue with hyacinths, the old country inns, and, most intoxicating of all, the rolling open down, eyed with dewponds, across whose bosom

the shadows of the summer clouds would race. Memories of all these, with the different birds which favoured them and gave them life, are enshrined in this little book, and informed with the very spirit of eternal youth.



CHAPTER II

MOUNT DEMAVEND

"Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops."

NOT a few people have expressed to me surprise on being told that the highest mountain in the Old World west of the Himalayas is to be found in Persia. Though Demavend has never been accurately surveyed, there is no doubt that he out-tops by a good margin any rival west of the great central mass of Asia. Early descriptions of the mountain put its height at twenty-one thousand feet, some even at twenty-two, while the late Lord Curzon, in his unrivalled work on Persia, gives it nineteen thousand five hundred. The latest German Atlas reduces the height to a poor five thousand six hundred and seventy metres—equivalent to about eighteen thousand seven hundred feet. But whichever of these estimates we take as accurate, the supremacy of Demavend remains unquestioned.

We all know that the nobility of a mountain depends on much besides the altitude of the summit above sea-level. Ben Nevis is but a mole-hill amongst the world's mountains; yet, seen from certain points of vantage, the hill lacks neither dignity nor awesomeness. Mount Olympus is only ten thousand feet high, but viewed from the low ground now traversed by the Salonika railway, none can dispute that here was a fitting home for the Gods of Greece. The great massive block with its riven sides, mighty flanks, and

terrific rock-falls, seemed to me, at least, the most sublime of all mountains. Demavend may be nearly twice as high as Olympus, but for rugged grandeur it cannot be compared to its classic rival. The reason is that the Persian mountain is an extinct volcano, and its very symmetry detracts from its impressiveness. It is true that Fujiyama (twelve thousand nine hundred and thirty feet) is also a volcano, and yet one of the famous sights of the world. But Fuji has a much broader top than Demavend and a far more majestic outline. What, for instance, can equal in its way the stupendous clean sweep of the shoulder of Fuji from the very summit to the sea itself? It has been said that truth resembles a great mountain, in that, while it always remains the same, its aspect varies according to the direction from which it is regarded. And it is just this variety of aspect in Fuji which the Japanese so rightly reverence in their national mountain. Demavend, with its sharp point and too steep sides, recalls a church steeple, also a symbol of truth, but one which looks the same from whatever place you view it.

We have disparaged our giant enough, and it is time to bring out his points. That he is monarch of all he surveys no traveller in North Persia will deny; for he towers a good six thousand feet above his fellows of the Elburz range and dominates not only Tehran but the country a hundred miles to the south of the capital. To the north he looks down into the Caspian; or rather would do so if that Moslem sea did not veil her face with cloud to avoid his glance. From his flanks wells the life-blood of perennial waters—not of great rivers perhaps—but of pellucid springs and streams more precious than rubies in a thirsty land. If he scorns to show a different face to every gazer, he knows how to clothe his brow in wrath and how to

impress his vassals by his majestic calm ; for he is a moody fellow.

There are many ways of approaching Mount Demavend from Tehran ; but the one most usually followed is that which skirts Shimran to the east and crosses the southernmost barrier of the Elburz range by the Afjee pass, the summit of which must be close on ten thousand feet. It was from the top of the Afjee that I first saw Demavend in all his majesty. The late Sir Cecil Spring-Rice and I had left Tehran the day before and slept on the roof of a house in the little village at the foot of the Kotal. The ascent before us was long and steep, and we started hours before sunrise in order to avoid the heat. We could not have timed it better, for we arrived at our point of vantage just as the sun struck the snow-capped peak of the mountain before us. It is difficult and unprofitable to appraise the merits of a view, but we were both struck breathless by the splendour which suddenly met us as we topped the last rise. At a distance of twenty miles or so the giant overwhelmed us with his bulk and stature ; and we looked at him over valleys still filled with the purple shadow of the night. From these he rose as from his bed ; his head-dress flaming pink, a broad white girdle of fleecy cloud round his waist, and his skirts of azure blue. Long we gazed at him as he shed his gorgeous garments before our eyes ; but at last we felt the scene was too intimate for an intruder's presence, and we began the descent into the Lar valley before he had assumed his workaday dress of drab khaki and white turban.

During the summer months we often used to have a camp in this Lar valley, and take turn about to stay there. In earlier days still, the whole Legation moved up there for the summer and maintained a service of mounted messengers between the camp and the

capital ; but those spacious times had already gone in 1900. As you approached the camping ground from the Afjee, you passed a stupendous cliff round whose top a score of vultures, no bigger than larks, were always soaring ; and near the foot of the enclosing hills there gushed up at intervals strong springs, crystal clear and ice-cold, out of round turf bowls into which you could plunge your whole head as into a basin of sizzling champagne. These fed the river which wound through the bottom of the glen in curves and loops, stickles and pools, the very picture of a trout stream ; altogether a delectable spot about eight thousand feet above the sea.

There were plenty of trout in the river, though few over half a pound ; and for these our carefully selected flies had to compete with the nimble fingers of the Persians, who seemed to find a fish under every stone and who shared the valley with us. These were nomads living all the year round in their black tents, which they moved from the lower to the higher ground as the heat of the advancing summer withered the herbage necessary to their flocks. They made no apparent impression on the stock of fish and gave life and local colour to the lonely valley. You could see, if you peered quickly through the open flap of the tent as you passed, the swarthy, unveiled mistress within, swaying to and fro what looked like the suspended headless body of a shaven goat, but was in reality that animal's skin filled with milk and performing the functions of a churn. When tired of the pools near our camp, we would get on our ponies and canter off three or four miles over the soft turf, rods ready mounted over the shoulder. On seeing a likely stretch of water, we would get off ; and the groom held the ponies till we moved on or cantered back to camp in the quickly failing light. Colonel Peter Hawker would

thoroughly have approved of this equestrian method of fishing. For did he not once for a bet land a fabulous number of trout actually sitting on his horse in the water-meadows of Longparish ?

Such were the "sheilaq" or summer quarters of our Legation ; and most of those who stayed there were content with the placid pleasures of the valley itself. Such a one was the companion who had joined me after the *Chargé d'Affaires* left. A cavalry officer by profession, he had a justifiable contempt for two legs as a means of progression ; and he never ceased to express unflattering astonishment at my early morning excursions to the neighbouring tops after ibex and wild sheep. These raids had resulted in nothing except a small ibex ; and it was evident that the flocks and herds of the *Iliats*, as the people of the black tents are called, and the attendant shepherds were disturbing the whole neighbourhood. Even camels were now to be seen grazing high up on the hill, looking enormous and grotesquely out of place to a man spying the ground for game through a telescope. It was the offence of their presence which finally led me to consult my retainers as to a move.

There is a great difference between an expedition, even a modest one, in the West and the East. In places like Canada everything is cut down to a minimum ; and the leader, and incidentally the financier, of the party has to do a great deal besides go out after game. In the East, for a number of excellent reasons unnecessary to mention, things are managed differently, and even a humble Third Secretary does not go into the wilds without a considerable retinue. My own consisted of an Austrian servant, a Persian stalker, a cook, a groom, two muleteers, two ponies, five mules, a donkey, and three tents. To make a success of the trip it was necessary to consult all these persons,

except the second muleteer and the Austrian. Of these two, the former did what the head muleteer told him, and the latter accepted without demur the decisions of his master. He was an excellent and handy man, especially good with horses ; but he was somewhat lost in Persia. So hazy were his ideas in the matter of geography that he was bitterly disappointed on arriving at Tehran to find that we were to take no part in the Boer war which was then proceeding. He had left Vienna with high hopes of seeing something of the fighting.

As the object of our move was ibex and sheep, the opinion of the shikarchi was of the first importance. Bakhshiali made a permanent living out of the Legation by acting in the capacity of stalker during the summer, and by bestowing " presents " on us periodically during the rest of the year. The acceptance of half a dozen fresh eggs, a red-legged partridge, or something of that kind from a friend in Bakhshiali's position in life necessitated a return present from our exalted selves of a sum of money at least five times the market value of the original offering. The whole business was part of the game of life as understood in Persia ; and a very entertaining and harmless game it was. Bakhshiali was tall, lean, and wiry, a fine walker, a good judge of ground, with a very keen eye on the open hill and a sound knowledge of the habits of ibex and sheep. He was not quite a first-class stalker, as he had not an instinctive knowledge of what was or was not possible at a pinch during a stalk. He was inclined to be lazy, and on the march invariably rode a very small donkey, which was his own property and carried all his belongings besides himself. He was certainly greedy, and habitually ate too much meat if he got the chance. These traits, and a certain naïveté of character, made him the butt of the other

Persians and a useful man in camp, as he kept them merry. He declared that the best place to pitch a camp with a chance of getting really good heads was high up on the shoulder of Demavend, at a place called Dagh, a long day's march from Lar.

Reza, the cook and factotum, who had been years in the Legation, was quite ready for a move to Dagh. He was no exception to the rule that Persians are at their best when camping out, or indeed when travelling in any way. This is the life they really like ; and a grumbling and lazy member of the household in Tehran becomes a different being when he is told that a trip is planned. No discomfort, or even real hardship, damped Reza's spirits on the march. The moment the mules came to a halt he began unpacking the implements of his craft ; and before the tents were up he had laid the foundation for an excellent four-course dinner to be served as soon as you were ready. It was Reza, too, who gave tone to the caravan by his lordly demeanour amongst the villagers or the Iliats. Each march he left the capital behind, the Third Secretary under Reza's charge rose a step in rank ; until in outlying parts he was accorded the dignity and accepted the homage due to a Grand Vizier. All this was part of the art of travel which, to an educated Persian, does not consist in transporting yourself speedily from place to place, but in tarrying in spots of special beauty and in drawing inspiration from the company and conversation of the strangers you mix with. Often did the Mirza who taught us Persian expatiate on the folly of Europeans travelling like so many parcels in a van, and extol the intellectual pleasures of true travel. The subtle joys of flattery and deference above your deserts have to be paid for in Persia as elsewhere ; and it was out of the question for a man of exalted rank to buy provisions at the

same rate as an ordinary mortal. But Reza knew to a hair's breadth how far he could go in this direction. His judgment of his master's weakness was as infallible as was his knowledge of the depth of his master's purse, which he himself carried. For it was considered unbecoming for the great to handle money personally ; you called up your Reza by clapping the hands together and ordered him to settle the business. There was something which appealed to me particularly in never having a farthing in my own possession when travelling. Such was Reza Khan, as he liked to be styled ; most amusing of companions, most subtle of psychologists, devoted to those whom he liked, and most typical of Persians.

A very different man was Mazmun, the head muleteer. He was as dour as the other was twinkling ; as outspoken as Reza was diplomatic, and as austere as honest as the latter was accommodating. The Charvards of Persia formed a guild noted for an honesty which was vital to the trade of the country. For all goods were in those days conveyed on mule or camelback, often for weeks at a time, and over country where losses might easily be explained away. But the muleteers and camelmen prided themselves on safe delivery ; and cases of theft by them were almost unknown. The only thing that really interested Mazmun was the condition of his animals ; and nothing would induce him to overload or overdrive them. I was relieved when he pronounced the march to Dagh as neither too steep nor too long for a day. There remained my groom, or Gholam. He was a good horseman, but there his merits ended. An Azerbaijan Turk, he seemed to combine in his person the less admirable qualities of the Turkish and Persian races ; and I did not often take him out camping. He would have much preferred to remain in the valley

of Lar, but had no valid reason for objecting to leaving it. An unexpected difficulty arises sometimes in these shooting trips. Persians, especially muleteers, are very particular about their diet, and must have large quantities of bread. Now the flat Persian bread is excellent when fresh, but it soon gets stale, in which state the Persians will have none of it. So somehow or other you have got to keep up a supply of fairly fresh bread, which can, of course, only be baked in a proper oven. This often influences your programme.

Having started the caravan off in the early morning, we cantered down the river after it with our rods, as we wanted to try a nice-looking bit of water about four miles below the camp. After landing half a dozen trout I left my companion to continue his fishing and began climbing out of the valley. All day we rode and walked over the huge, bare slopes, following a track known to the Charvardars; and it was not till the evening that we reached Dagh and pitched our tents. A more desolate spot it would be difficult to imagine. We were about fourteen thousand feet up on one of the southern shoulders of Demavend, from which rose the great cone of the extinct volcano in a clear upward sweep blocking the view to the north. In every other direction the eye ranged over an endless expanse of great slopes and peaks, just beginning to assume a short-lived beauty from the long shadows of the setting sun. We seemed indeed on the roof of the world, but the unexpected barking of a dog showed that we were not there alone. A tribe of Iliats spent the hottest of the year at this spot, where they had so far departed from their usual habits as to build a permanent rampart of loose stones to protect their black tents from the blast. Persians are sociable folk, and the owners of this encampment were known

to my retainers, who, no doubt, had chosen the place on that account.

It was the 15th July, but I was glad to wear a short fur coat as I ate an excellent dinner ; and the last thing I remember before going off to sleep under a pile of blankets, was wondering at the tenuity of the tinkling of the considerable stream which flowed past the tent from a great patch of dirty snow a hundred yards higher. In the morning there was not a sound when I woke ; the stream was frozen solid. Bakhshiali and I were off betimes ; so early, in fact, that we had to stop in order that he should say his morning prayer when the sun rose. This is the best time of day for the stalker in these regions ; for the game is then afoot and on the feed, and thus much easier to find than when lying quiet. Moreover, the light for spying is at its best in the early morning before the heat-haze sets the whole landscape in a shimmer. In those days ibex, as we called them, and wild sheep were fairly plentiful in the Elburz mountains. The former were in reality *Capra ægagrus*, the ordinary wild goat of Asia Minor, and the scientific name of the latter is, I believe, *Ovis gmelini*. These are not, of course, to be compared with Ammon, Poli, or Big Horn for weight of body or of horns, but the best rams are fine beasts, and I have not seen their equal amongst trophies of the lesser sheep. I had already obtained some fair specimens of both, but this high ground was supposed to be the last resort of the patriarchs.

It is difficult to make an entertaining narrative out of a day's shooting, but this was so much the most interesting day I had in Persia that I am tempted to try. It was a day of ups and downs and of unusual, though not of thrilling, incidents. We began by sighting a fine ram about two miles off, and so bungled the business that, when after a long detour, we got to

the spot from which we expected to begin the stalk proper, he was in full flight about four hundred yards away. He was far the biggest ram I ever saw in Persia, and for years the outline of his great curling horns, as seen from the rear, haunted my dreams. He was just what we were after, but we never saw him again though we searched for miles. At last we sat down and began spying new ground. It was already about eleven o'clock and the light was bad; but through the shimmer I caught in my telescope the glint of horns perhaps a mile and a half away. At first Bakhshiali could not pick them up; but, after looking long through the glass, a trick of the light gave him a clearer view, and he agreed that ibex horns were showing. We could approach to within a half a mile without difficulty, and from there we could make out about a dozen full-grown billy goats dozing away the day. Between us and them there was a patch of snow perhaps a hundred yards broad to cross, mostly in full view; so we agreed to rest for a time in the hope of the beasts moving. Lying full length on my back with my pith helmet over my face and half asleep, I was roused by the sound of mighty rushing wings; and started up to find an enormous griffon vulture seated about six feet off. Heavily the obscene bird flapped away, as I gave signs of the life which it had hoped was already extinct.

Time was getting on, and we were a long way from camp. The ground was not dangerously steep, but it was rough enough to make a walk in the dark arduous if not impossible, and I had no stomach for a night in the open. The ibex showed not the slightest sign of movement, and they looked so uncommonly sleepy that we at last decided to cross the snow. I sat down with the glass on the beasts whilst Bakhshiali crossed first. Not a muscle did they move, and I joined him

on the other side, where we were quite under cover. The rest of the stalk was easy enough, and, when we gently poked our heads round the great rock which had so long been our goal, there were thirteen fine male ibex lying within a hundred and twenty yards of us. This was the chance of a lifetime, and I was determined to make the most of it. So I examined the beasts through the glass with the greatest care, to see which had the best head and to make out exactly how they were lying down, for nothing is easier than to wound an animal lightly in this position unless you know exactly how he has composed his body and limbs. Finally, I selected a beast in a favourable position and with as good a head as any, fired and immediately reloaded my '303. To my disappointment he rose with the rest at the shot, and began to make off slowly across a patch of snow. He was badly wounded, but it took two more shots to bring him down, and, by the time I had done with him, the rest were out of sight. I had counted on getting three really good heads, and here I was with only one, and all due to bad shooting. The only excuse was the altitude, which plays strange pranks on one's capacities. The ibex had just enough life in him to enable Bakhshiali to cut his throat and make its meat fit for Moslem consumption. He then cut off the head and buried the carcass under loose stones after marking the spot. The longest horn measured thirty-nine inches. Bakhshiali groaned and complained not a little under his load, and was, I believe, really tired when we got home just after dark. It had been a long day.

Next morning Bakhshiali went off with a mule to bring in the meat, and I spent the day close to camp. Saxicolae of several species were to be seen perched on the stones after their kind, but the most interesting

bird was the snow partridge, *Tetraogallus caspius*, or Kabk-i-Dareh as the Persians call him. This last name is something of a puzzle, for it means partridge of the valley, and of all game birds the snow partridge keeps the highest ground. Personally, I never saw one under ten thousand feet ; but it is probable that in the winter they come lower, or they would not be for sale in the Tehran bazaar as they are in the cold weather. Whatever the reason for his name, our friend is a notable fowl. Nearly as big as a hen caper, he is particularly fond of the long, steep screes so common in the higher Elburz ; and such is his bulk that he often sets them rolling in miniature avalanches as he takes his morning and evening stroll. His cry first attracted my attention, for it is exactly like that uttered by the curlew in spring. When I first heard the liquid, rippling notes I could not believe they did not come from a curlew, and it was only after I had seen the burly musician more than once that I was convinced. By the middle of July the young can fly, and we heard and saw them every day at Dagh.

It had not been my intention to climb Demavend when I started on what was a purely shooting trip, and the idea only gradually took shape during my day of rest. The mountain had often been climbed before from the north side, where there was, indeed, something in the nature of a regular track from the village of Reneh to the top ; and a long and careful examination of the ground through the telescope showed that it could equally well be scaled from my camp. The Iliats whom I engaged in conversation on the subject were not at first encouraging. They declared it would take a week to reach the top, and that the Jinns who lived there were of a particularly truculent and dangerous breed. This did not impress me, because it was the sort of way negotiations would naturally

begin if Persians thought I should want a guide ; and I did not pursue the subject further. Next day was blank, though we were twelve hours on the hill, and in the evening I asked Bakhshiali if he would care to come up Demavend. He did not like the idea at all, and pleaded a deranged stomach—an excuse with some foundation of fact, as he had eaten far too much ibex meat the night before.

I was now beginning to get quite keen to climb the mountain, but I did not want to go up alone, as I wished some one to carry a camera. Nor did I want to take my Austrian servant, who was anxious to go, because he knew far less about the business than I myself. So I told Reza to resume the conversations with the Iliats at the point where they had broken down over the Jinns. Next day again was blank ; and Reza reported in the evening that none of the Iliats would go with me—at any rate, he added significantly, for the reward offered. I had promised to rejoin the Captain in the Lar valley the next evening, 20th July ; so I told Reza to let the Iliats know that now was their last chance, and that, if no one was willing to start at half-past three next morning, they could not start at all. I also empowered my plenipotentiary to raise the reward to one pound a head for two men. I should expect a definite reply by nine that evening. Talleyrand may have been right with his “*surtout pas de zèle*,” but it is certain that Reza’s ears would have been deaf to the maxim. That evening must have been one of the most enjoyable in the diplomatic career which he started in his cradle. No doubt he was pecuniarily interested to some small extent in the result, but the important thing for him was to issue from the contest with the prestige of success. I could hear the wordy struggle plainly during dinner, and it reached its climax of intensity

about ten minutes before the ultimatum expired. After that moment conversation suddenly resumed its usual tones, and at nine o'clock Reza pushed aside the flap of my tent and announced, as if it were the simplest thing in the world, that two active men would be very pleased to start with me at three-thirty next morning for the top of Demavend. With equal nonchalance I ordered breakfast at three, and we said good-night. We understood each other.

It was just light enough to see the ground under our feet when the two Iliats and I started off next morning. After about a couple of hours' stiff walking, one of them lay down and explained that he was about to expire. The morning was fine and the ground quite safe, so we left him to think it over and proceeded on our way. So long as we could keep to the rock we made good progress; for the Persian shoes, called *givehs*, with their thick hemp soles, grip any dry surface like the feet of a fly. The footwear of the country is always the best to use, and nothing can equal the *giveh* for lightness and comfort on the Persian uplands. On wet surfaces they give a poor hold and soon wear out, so the Persians always take them off when crossing a stream. But it was not everywhere possible to keep to the rocky ridges, snow slopes and screes had occasionally to be climbed. The former gave us little trouble, as the surface was fairly hard; but the latter are terribly fatiguing, since their angle is so steep that you set them on the move with each step, and thus slip back at every stride. At first the effect is alarming, but experience soon teaches you that no dangerous avalanche develops. The mass invariably settles down again. It was not till we were within a thousand feet or so of the top that I began to feel any effects of altitude. From there on the effort of walking made me so giddy that I had to sit down every few minutes.

As soon as muscular effort ceased, I felt perfectly normal again. Thus by easy stages we reached the summit at nine o'clock.

Here I sat down to rest. Not so my camera-bearer, who, unlike his companion, had evidently felt not the slightest fatigue during the climb. He rushed about the top shouting and cutting capers with excitement. And it must be admitted that the scene was a strange one. The top was a rough circle about a hundred yards across, and covered with snow, through which protruded irregular rocks of pure yellow sulphur. The effects of the dazzling snow and the brilliant yellow was the more striking in that it was quite unexpected. I put some pieces of rock in my pocket, and found later that you could light them with a match. The whole top smelt strongly of sulphur, as did all the upper part of the cone. The view, as so often is the case, was disappointing. In the early morning and late afternoon long shadows lend to the Persian plateau a passing beauty, but when the sun is well up there is nothing to relieve the uniform drab earth which clothes the mountain in khaki. It was only to the north that the view was worth the effort of the climb. In this direction you looked down on a solid carpet of dazzling clouds many thousand feet below ; a carpet with rents in it, through which protruded the forest-clad spurs of Mazanderan, and covering under its illimitable folds the whole bosom of the Caspian Sea. Five-and-twenty years ago such a prospect was only unfolded to a favoured few. The advent of the flying age has made it a commonplace of life.

The wind cut like a knife on Demavend, and we did not linger long after taking some photographs. In descending, we avoided the hard rocks which had been so friendly to us for the climb, and chose the snow slopes and the screes which now helped us on our way.

We found our dying friend where we had left him, and at first he followed sheepishly. But when we reached camp he swaggered in with his companion, and I could not resist telling the admiring crowd that he had been lying down all the morning. I was sorry later; he was so utterly crestfallen at the shout of laughter which replaced the earlier plaudits. It was noon, and my caravan had already left for Lar, with the exception of the groom and Austrian servant, with my ponies and one fast mule. My head was splitting, but, after lying down for a couple of hours under the fly of a tent left for the purpose, and eating a moderate meal, I felt perfectly fresh, and started for Lar two hours later. We caught the caravan just as it reached the valley, and cantered the whole four miles to camp, which was reached with the last of the light. Here my Captain was awaiting me with one of those *recherché* dinners of which he had the secret when in camp, and thoroughly we enjoyed it. But the incident of the evening which remains most vividly in my recollection was the bath beforehand. My host offered to pour the water over my back, and, knowing his Indian habits, I expected a delicious hot douche. It was a bucket of icy water I received, and, such was the surprise, that I sprang up with a yell as if I had been scalded. Next day we started back together for Tehran.



CHAPTER III

SOME EXPERIENCES IN BULGARIA

"A good traveller is something at the latter end of a dinner, but one that lies three thirds, and uses a known truth to pass a thousand nothings with, should be once heard, and thrice beaten."

It was a typical October afternoon in the year 1909 when the Orient Express drew up in Sofia station and deposited its few passengers on the platform. In those days the famous train offered social opportunities of a kind not usually afforded by railway travel; for it combined to some extent the amenities of a club with the attributes of the office of a cosmopolitan company-promoter. You were sure to meet in it diplomatic colleagues, King's messengers, and other travellers, with whom you could discuss any topic under the sun in any language with which you were acquainted; and the attendants supplied your wants with that discreet familiarity which gives to service its proper character of co-operation between friends for their mutual benefit. This intimate demeanour was the compliment paid by a discerning class to the diplomatic or semi-diplomatic character of what may be called the club members of the train; and it was not extended to the business element. The latter would hobnob in twos and threes, speaking low and fast; looking warily round not to be overheard themselves, while pricking their ears to catch any secret which some indiscreet diplomat might let fall. Sometimes, passing by a group, you would catch the word "concession";

but more often your curiosity had to be satisfied with eloquent gestures and knowing glances. These gentry became more numerous as you travelled East, the last important contingent usually boarding the train at Budapest. They had plenty of time to hatch their plans as they journeyed over the wide Hungarian plain with its scattered isolated farms denoting a long era of security, and through the Balkan countries with their close-packed villages.

We left both officials and concession hunters to continue their journey to Constantinople when we alighted at Sofia. The town lies on a plain seventeen hundred feet above the sea, between the Balkan and the Rhodope ranges, and is almost entirely modern, with electric trams, light, and all the other appurtenances of Western civilisation, which mingle oddly with the creaking of buffalo carts and the sheepskin coats of the peasants in the streets. Little remained of the old wooden one-story shanties of which the town consisted thirty years before, and they have probably entirely disappeared by now.

The population of about one hundred thousand still showed the mixed characteristics common to towns in the Levant. There were said to be thirty thousand Macedonians, employed mainly in the building and allied trades, whose quickness and versatility were a source of more envy than appreciation to their slower witted compatriots. The Israelites and Armenians were numerous in the retail trade, having replaced the Greeks who were all hunted out of the country at the time when Greek and Bulgarian bands were at each other's throats in Macedonia. The Jews, by the way, are called Spaniards by courtesy—at any rate they call themselves so—owing to their still speaking the language of Castile over most of the East; almost as unexpected and strange a survival as the use of the

Maria Theresa dollar by the modern Abyssinians. The gipsies formed an important element of the population. Men and women wore trousers, and were curiously dirty in appearance. They talked their own tongue amongst themselves, but had given up their nomad habits and lived in fixed abodes, strange modern dwellings made of little else but old packing cases and kerosene tins. They were regarded by the rest somewhat as outcasts, and earned a livelihood as porters and hucksters and odd-job men generally. These were the people described by the more exuberant war correspondents in the first Balkan war as "Turks," whose inferiority to their Christian neighbours was quickly discerned as symptomatic of the trend of the campaign.

Finally, there were the Bulgarians, the strange vicissitudes of whose fate since 1909 have been an object lesson to all who wish to learn. They took but little part in the trade of the town, and had none of the suppleness necessary in commerce. Indeed, it was said that no transaction in the market was possible between two Bulgarian peasants without the intervention of a gipsy, who ran between the two, arguing, whittling down the price of the seller and raising the offer of the purchaser, till at last, with the stroking caress universal in the East, he would bring the recalcitrant men of business together, and all three would adjourn for refreshment. The Bulgarian is truly a son of the soil, wedded to the uncomplaining earth, whose very qualities he seems to have drawn into his being. Unequalled obstinacy and tenacity of purpose, combined with the most practical point of view, promised great things for the race. Frugal and taciturn, he has none of the thoughtless cheeriness of the Roumanian, the expansiveness of the Serb, or the dreamy, unpractical idealism of the Russian. He

resembles rather the Lowland Scot, and carries his many admirable qualities beneath an exterior which it is not everyone's good fortune to penetrate.

Autumn is the finest season in most parts of the world, and nowhere more so than on the high Bulgarian plain, where the clear, cool air and radiant sun give full value to the distant mountains. The purchase of a gun licence put all the shooting at the disposal of the sportsman, provided he kept outside enclosures, which were few. In the old days, before the spread of cheap firearms, and before there was any regular market for game in the towns, very good shooting could be had round Sofia, but this was no longer so when we arrived; and the sportsman had to expect a long tramp rather than a heavy bag, and to be prepared, when at last he reached a promising bit of ground, to find that it had just been scoured by a rival party from Sofia, or visited that morning by a couple of village shooters. These were incidents to be borne with what equanimity could be found by those accustomed to the carefully preserved fields of England.

The Sofia plain seems to lie on the direct route of the great autumn and spring migrations of birds from Russia and Central Europe to the shores of Africa. In the autumn the various kinds of hawks were extraordinarily numerous, and red-footed falcons streamed in flocks to their roosting places in the evenings. Hobbies, kestrels, both greater and lesser, merlins, peregrines, and other kinds difficult to identify, were constantly in sight; and it was hard to say where food for such a host was to be found. There were, it is true, great numbers of a kind of vole; and small birds, especially larks, were very abundant. But the kestrels and red-footed falcons seemed to pay little heed to them, and may have found some insect food we did

not see. These flocks of hawks were about the plain for some weeks, but only a few of the resident species were to be seen by the end of October.

The only other place I have seen hawks in these numbers was one summer at Argos in the Peloponnese. These were common kestrels, and not, of course, on passage as were the flocks in Bulgaria. There were hundreds, if not thousands, of them, sitting on the telegraph wires and hawking for insects in the hot evening air. In that southern clime they comported themselves in every way after the manner of gigantic and rather clumsy swallows, preferring the neighbourhood of the little town, in the buildings of which they seemed to have their nests.

The most remarkable migration of birds during our stay in Bulgaria was not, however, witnessed on the open plain, but in the town from the windows of our house at night. It was about midnight on 3rd September that one of those shattering thunderstorms common in Bulgaria woke us up. As the storm rumbled off into the distance, unusual noises outside drew us to the open window. The whole sky was full of the clamour of birds, and their forms fluttered through the shadows of the trees lining the wide boulevard outside. The migrants must have been in fabulous numbers and of many species, and they had evidently been driven down by the heavy storm from the high altitudes at which they usually travel. The lights of the town had then attracted and bemused some of them. As we stood wondering at the open window, we saw a purple heron lying on the pavement beneath a bright street light just below, and a moment later the form of a cat stealing on its prey. But the bird was uninjured, and made a vicious lunge at the enemy with its powerful bill. The cat started back and the heron flapped heavily off into the darkness.

In half an hour the night was still again. Next morning we flushed a pair of quails from our veranda ; and all day boys were hawking captured birds round the town. I noticed especially a number of purple herons and a few buff-backed egrets.

Large bags of quails were made after the visitation, and the migration consisted evidently of a huge mixed host of the most dissimilar species. It confirmed, what lighthouse reports have taught us, that favourable conditions induce birds of many kinds to leave their homes simultaneously ; and it well illustrated the dangers to which migrants are exposed in their wanderings. Had the storm occurred when the birds were over the sea, countless numbers would have perished.

Inquiries as to shooting soon put us in touch with an old Hungarian cab-driver, who had personally conducted Western sportsmen to the best spots in the neighbourhood for many years. His German, which was the only language we had in common, was a constant source of amusement to us ; and he referred to various distinguished officials of former days in terms which would have astonished them not a little. There was one mysterious and semi-heroic individual whose identity completely baffled us for a considerable time. He was always referred to as "Der Olliot," and the fabulous nature of his bags and the infinitesimal number of cartridges with which he had obtained his results never failed to fill us with respectful envy, especially my companion, who was a first-rate game-shot and had won the Grand Prix at Monte Carlo not long before. After much discussion we came to the conclusion that this personage must be His Majesty's then representative at Athens, who had for some years resided at Sofia.

We made a good many excursions in the course of the shooting season. Borosch, the coachman, was

the possessor of a shabby old victoria and a pair of skinny horses, which were a good deal bigger than the usual native nags, and, if hardly overfed, were at any rate well cared for. With this equipage we negotiated roads which would soon have settled the fate of a heavy English carriage and pair of fat horses. For the roads were typical Slav roads, axle-deep in mud after rain, and full of cavernous pits and ruts in dry weather. Has anyone satisfactorily explained the workings of the natural law which condemns the Slav race to dwell in the midst of a sea of mud? Here the peasants walked about the villages on short stilts in wet weather.

Cultivation and drainage had slowly but surely curtailed the vast marshes which once stretched across the plain, and they were now reduced to isolated patches varying in size from good large stretches, which took all the afternoon to walk over, to small bits which could be finished in half an hour. The large stretches were the most distant, and required a whole day to do them justice. When we had no time to visit these, we would start off after an early lunch and drive from patch to patch along tracks and over fields which were then bare of crops. When we came to a good stretch of turf Borosch would whip up his horses and, standing on the box, urge them on with strange cries. They responded with unexpected gallantry, would even try to kick over the traces, and the swaying of the carriage over the soft turf, the rush of the keen air, and the shouts of our Jehu, produced an effect of exhilaration beyond anything to be experienced at a day's covert-shooting at home. Borosch was, in fact, a bold and skilful driver, even when we lunched out, and after he had emptied the bottle of red Bulgarian wine which was his favourite beverage. White wine he would not touch, and he knew the quality of the supply of every inn for miles round. There was one

he would never pass : " Such a good wine it were a sin to leave," he always said.

The marshy ground was the only resort of game in the neighbourhood of Sofia after the maize had been cut at the end of August. The maize never attracted me. It only contained quails and a few hares, and the prodigious heat during the quail season and the lack of variety in the shot itself combined with the smallness of the quarry to make the sport of quail-shooting in these regions a doubtful pleasure. Even in Egypt in the winter it cannot be compared to any other form of shooting which provides at all the same number of shots.

In the marshes the variety was considerable, if the actual numbers bagged were small. Our autumn bag included common snipe, jack snipe, double snipe, dotterel, green plovers, ruffs, mallard, teal, and garganey. Of these far the most numerous were the common snipe, but the bags were very small; the best afternoon to my own gun was only eighteen head, and often we tramped for several hours for eight or ten head. But the bags were perhaps the least part of the enjoyment; for the marshes were full of birds impossible to approach. Geese would rise from a distant pool, and great flocks of plovers and waders sweep past out of shot; the garganey were in great numbers at times, and shovellers, widgeon, and other fowl constantly on the move. Once a small flock of great bustard flew quite close past us in the carriage, but we never saw them again. The double snipe is a heavy bird on the wing compared to his common cousin, and is easily known by his light-coloured rump. He utters a low, grating cry when he rises, and does not seem to be more solitary than the full snipe. He is, I think, superior to all his relatives on the table, and Borosch considered him the only quarry really worthy of pursuit. " Duppler," he

called them, but included in the term all waders bigger than the common snipe, which he called "simpler." Jack snipe were the object of pitying contempt and named "miserabler."

The villagers, as has been said, haunt the marshes and account largely for the smallness of the bags. It is not every villager who shoots. Usually, in fact, there is only one sportsman in the village, just as there is one innkeeper and one wag. He is a professional, and it says much for the orderliness of the population that I never heard of trouble between a visitor and one of these men whose livelihood depended upon their bag. It always surprised us that these professionals found it worth their while to shoot snipe, and presumably they picked their shots very carefully. Their chief object was ducks, and they would make artificial pools in the plain by damming up a drain and sit up all night close by in a little hut. Some had decoy ducks in the pool, but whether these were tethered in lines after the French manner described by Colonel Hawker, lest they should be shot by mistake in the dark, I cannot say. The huts needed to be cunningly constructed, for the shallow rain-water ponds are, unlike the French ponds, bare of vegetation round the edge. Our Bulgarian hut resembles a large turf mole-hill, such as are common on the South Downs, and is so indistinguishable from the plain that it looks like a natural feature of the ground. Peering through a small aperture facing the water, the peasant bides his time till his tame decoys have brought down some wild birds, and in such a position one of them had an unusual experience one evening.

A foreign colleague of mine was out shooting, and, as the light began to fail, spied some ducks on a small distant pond. Carefully he approached, crawling and

taking advantage of the only cover afforded by the ground, till he finally succeeded, without alarming his quarry, in resting his gun on the top of the hut within a few inches of the head of the unconscious rustic. The sporting section of the diplomatic corps could never agree as to whether our colleague or his rival was the more terrified when the gun was fired. The former admitted that his first thought was that an earthquake of unequalled severity followed the report, but we never knew the feelings of the latter. The incident closed amicably by the payment of an indemnity sufficient to cover the material damage to two favourite decoys and to appease the moral indignation of their owner. One cannot help wondering what would have happened had the Colonel been in the hut; we may be sure that the resources of his vocabulary would have been equal to an adequate description of the incident.

As is well known, the eagle, though not regarded by Englishmen as a desirable addition to the bag, is considered by Continental sportsmen as a great prize. Round Sofia eagles were fairly common—golden eagles they seemed to be—and Borosch explained at length the first day we went out that we were on no account to fire on one. It appears that in Bulgaria the bird is a sure protection against hail, and one of Borosch's patrons had years before got into serious trouble with some villagers for shooting an eagle. One cannot help wondering whether this connection of the eagle with hail is not a very old superstition. The "Bird of Jove," which flitted uneasily across our school-days, never suggested to me hail or anything else half so concrete; but Jove was the god of thunder, which usually accompanies hail, and it may be that the belief of the villagers of the Sofia plain was held by the ancients more than two thousand years ago.

In any case, the modern Bulgarians do not rely exclusively on the protection of the bird; they fire rockets at the clouds to burst them when a hailstorm threatens. Perhaps this, too, is the manifestation of a superstition of a more scientific order.

As December approached, sport in the plain became more and more precarious, and we determined to try a trip in the Rhodope, the range of mountains which divided Bulgaria from Turkey to the south. Chamois, bears, wolves, and roe were reported at first to be numerous, but they all diminished in the most disappointing fashion before closer inquiry. Finally, we decided to fix on chamois, partly because they undoubtedly existed and partly because their pursuit would take us above the forest zone and into a country well worth visiting even if we returned empty-handed. Every species of game in Bulgaria has its own particular close-time, and that for chamois was extended to the whole year except December, in the hope of saving the race from extinction. December had been left free, because few people care to go on the high ground so late. We thought the arrangement an excellent one, and were a little disappointed when we arrived near our ground to be told by every one that we ought to have come in July, as that was far the best month for chamois-shooting. General astonishment was expressed at our being influenced in our choice by the accident of the close season.

We left Sofia by train in thick, raw weather; the mountains were completely hidden by the mist, and in vain we tried to believe it was clearing. At the wayside station, on the main line to Constantinople, where we got out, a couple of carriages were waiting to take us to a large village near the foot of the mountains. Here we had a wait of several hours while the

pack ponies, which were supposed to be waiting, were got ready.

During this interval we seemed to make the acquaintance of everybody in the place. All the local hunters were in waiting, fine active men with rifles slung over their backs, and the thick felt clothes and raw-hide shoes, which became later so familiar to all readers of the illustrated papers. These same shoes make, by the way, excellent brogues for wading in chalk streams; they are much lighter than ordinary brogues, but are useless in northern rivers, as they slip on wet rock.

We saw at once that it was hopeless to fight against fate and abandoned the idea of a quiet and business-like excursion with one, or at most two men. When we finally moved off at about one o'clock, we were accompanied by some dozen volunteers, who had expressed their desire and determination to join our party. I felt really sorry for the village schoolmaster, an excellent fellow who had joined us at lunch, at being left behind, complaining loudly that his official duties gave him no time for enjoyment.

Our party soon left the flat and engaged in the spurs of the mountains, thickly covered with hazel, low beech, and oak. As we climbed, the slush was left behind and the paths became deep in snow. The men seemed confident of clear weather above, but it was difficult to believe it possible in the thick mist below. Yet after a couple of hours it became visibly brighter, and as we reached the spruce and left the deciduous trees behind, the sun broke through the clouds and turned the dull woods to a glittering glory.

Few occurrences in Nature are more wonderful than the flight of the mist before the sun. One has waited perhaps hours in the murky light without hope of change, and suddenly, in a moment, the hidden scene

is spread before you in all its splendour. So it was now, and from the path which skirted a ridge we looked upon a solid pall of dazzling cloud through which the Balkans far to the north shouldered their way into the sun.

It was dark by the time we reached our destination, a hut over five thousand feet up, just where the spruce gave way to the *Pinus montana*, the "latchen" so well known to hunters in Tyrol and Styria as almost impenetrable. The snow was here more than two feet deep, and the mountain-stream in front of the hut frozen almost solid. We were pretty tired and glad to get into the heat of the iron stove, which our followers soon had almost red hot with blazing wood.

After an excellent meal we retired to our half of the hut. The others, whose numbers had been further swelled by the arrival of a friendly gendarme, passed a perfectly happy night all in one small room, and talking as such men do all the world over.

Next morning, to our relief, some of our friends stayed at home, and we started off with quite a reasonable following up the valley. The snow was deep and the going extraordinarily heavy amongst the dwarf pines, which were laced together about breast-high. The men said the chamois were most likely to be amongst these, and I did my best to spy the ground thoroughly; but I have never seen a background so difficult as that formed by a mixture of dazzling snow, dark pines, and grey rock. It was no surprise to me, therefore, when, before I had seen anything, one of the hunters picked up a chamois about five hundred yards off with his naked eye. The beast had picked us up, too, and moved up the valley ahead of us.

We saw nothing more till we reached the limit of the mountain pines and began to climb the side of the glen to get a clear view. We were near the top and

pretty blown when I suddenly saw a chamois galloping down from the open hill above us back to the wood; he looked like a black woolly ball in the snow. We rushed forward to cut him off and were literally sobbing when he crossed barely a hundred yards above us. I was a little ahead of my companion and took the first shot, then followed three others between us, and he disappeared.

I could have cried with mortification. I had never had a shot at a chamois before and hardly really expected a shot at all when we started. He was, moreover, a good buck and in the finest winter coat; his much coveted "bart" stood up along his back like the hair of a great rough dog about to engage in a fight. Where the shots went I have no idea, and the worst of it was that he stood for my second shot. The men shook their heads and we tramped on to the top.

From the ridge there was nothing to be seen but the sea of cloud below, the distant Balkans, and the long array of glittering peaks which marked the Turkish frontier. Our hunters declared that the best thing was for them to drive the dwarf pines down to us. We went down the top of the ridge and stood at the edge of the spruce wood. My boots were not proof against the snow, and never, even hind-shooting in Scotland, have I suffered such agonies of cold in the feet as during that long wait. When the men finally came up I took off my boots, wrung out the stockings, and rubbed some sort of feeling into my feet.

There is no doubt that ordinary shooting-boots are useless in snow. The only thing to wear are boots big enough to take a pair of thick woollen socks over the ordinary stockings and still feel loose. With such boots and putties to keep the snow out of the

top of them, one can defy any amount of snow in comfort, but anything like a fitting boot with one pair of stockings is torture. It may be wondered how the men fared in their raw-hide shoes. They suffered a good deal, but, as they were walking all the time, and it was not cold enough for frost-bite, they were comfortable compared with ourselves; but their foot-gear was thoroughly unsuitable and they got soaked and slipped about.

We had a return drive of the top of the spruce wood and a chamois crossed the bottom of the glen below me. He was over three hundred yards off, but I had one shot at him without effect; he was no doubt the same as we had shot at before. While we were waiting for this drive a number of nutcrackers flitted about the woods in the valley. Their flight resembles that of a jay, and their cries are of the same type, though less harsh. They are remarkably tame birds, and hop about the spruce with the brisk, alert movements of the thrush tribe, and are altogether interesting and entertaining fellows.

The next day we saw no sign of chamois, and the men decided to hunt the woods for roe. They loosed their dogs, a kind of black-and-tan hound with a deep, bell-like note. This type of hound is very widespread and probably of ancient race. It is found in Turkey under the name of "kopoy," and a hound very similar is used in Norway for hare-hunting. I hear, too, that the hounds which used to hunt the deer in the Ribblesdale district of Yorkshire were of the same type; and that this pack were descended from hounds which are found in County Kerry, and which, like most things in the west of Ireland, are supposed to owe their origin to the Spanish Armada. Tradition does not relate whence the Dons drew them from, but it may be that they got them from farther east.

A roe passed close to my companion, but it had shed its horns, and as no Austrian sportsman will shoot a roe in that condition it was allowed to go free. This gave rise to a terrible scene when our fellow-hunters arrived and realised what had happened. They shouted, gesticulated, and one of them threw his cap on the ground with fury. With difficulty they were pacified, and it was explained that, in our country, it was an unpardonable crime to shoot a hornless deer—something like stealing a friend's cow or poisoning his best sheep-dog. Grumbling they resumed the chase, and fortunately killed a roe themselves, so that we returned a united party to the hut at dark. The whole animal disappeared at the evening meal, and very good it was.

Next morning we took again to the woods and followed a real bear's track for a considerable distance. It was some days old, and after struggling for hours with the dwarf pines we had to give up the hunt. After lunch we packed the ponies and returned to Sofia that night, plunging once more into the thick fog, which had never left the plain.

When spring comes round the ducks and waders return once more to the marshes on their way north. They begin to arrive in March, and are nearly all gone by the middle of April. The double snipe seemed most numerous during the first week of April, just after the arrival of the storks, which Borosch regarded only in the light of useful heralds of the approach of the "duppler." But spring is not the time for gunning, even when the birds are unpaired and far from their breeding haunts. By April the marshes were gay with marigolds and the brilliant green of the young grass. The water tortoises had emerged from their winter quarters, and the quaky ground seemed almost to quiver with the croaking of the frogs.

Peewits swooped round the head of an intruder just as they do on the Hampshire Downs. They bred in great numbers in the marshes ; were, in fact, entirely a marsh bird in the breeding season. They placed their nests always on the top of a tussock standing well above the surface of the bog, which made it an easy task to find them.

In looking for eggs one day I saw a jack snipe crouching in the coarse grass not two feet from a small water tortoise. His bright eyes were fixed on me, but he never moved while I stooped slowly down and grasped him firmly in my hand. He was quite unhurt, and after admiring the beautiful markings on his back I opened my hand and he flitted off with the aimless, inconsequent flight of his kind. The tortoise required less precaution to secure, and I bundled him into my bag to give to the children, who thought him an enchanting pet. Three yards farther on I took three peewit's eggs, a novel and varied yield for a few square yards of bog.



CHAPTER IV

BATHING

"I saw him beat the surges under him,
And ride upon their backs ; he trod the water,
Whose enmity he flung aside, and breasted
The surge most swollen that met him ; his bold head
'Bove the contentious waves he kept, and oar'd
Himself with his good arms in lusty stroke."

BATHING is essentially the recreation of the young—not of the very young, whose terror is often so extreme as to be vocal on their first introduction to the sea, as those acquainted with the sands of our southern and eastern coasts will testify. I shudder still at the memory of my first day on the Ramsgate beach at the age of eight. No doubt it was not rough, but the waves seemed monstrous and overwhelming in their rhythmic rush, and, had it not been for the encouragement of a grown-up brother of twelve, I should have disgraced myself before the whole school within a few weeks of my arrival. This phase soon passes and, once the art of swimming is mastered, young people of both sexes often develop a positive passion for the water.

At Winchester an attempt was made to moderate our enthusiasm by forbidding more than one bathe a day, but I do not know that the rule was ever kept, and, if it had been, there was no limit laid down for the duration of the one bathe. The bathing place was merely a stretch of the Itchen about a hundred yards long, screened by wooden palings from the

outside world and supplied with the usual appurtenances for diving. It was rather a jolly, untidy place, with long grass which gradually got worn down as the summer advanced; though in the spring it had been known to hide a wild duck's nest until the nine eggs were all successfully hatched. The river entered the enclosure through a cut only a few yards wide, which was spanned by boards; and there was a fine rush of clear water twelve feet deep or more, which curled back again under the left bank.

The bathing man was an institution of the place—his sleek, seal-like body apparently equally impervious to the effects of a cutting wind and long immersion in cold water. He was particularly in request when boys were passing the swimming test, and more than once I have seen him plunge in and land a spluttering competitor on to the bank. On one occasion we persuaded a boy who could not swim that all would be well if he only had the courage to jump in, the current would carry him down the eighty yards or so to the steps which marked his goal. So in sprang our hero from the boards, and long we waited for his head to reappear. At last the surface was broken twenty yards below the starting point by a foot; and Powell had to retrieve the plucky victim of the "joke."

The passion for bathing cools with the hot blood of youth, and many middle-aged people must wonder at their early hardihood. But diplomats have the advantage of visiting countries washed by seas warm enough to be enjoyed at an age when the very thought of Cromer, or even of Brighton, makes them shudder. And it is one of the few consolations of the Great War to think that it extended this diplomatic privilege to many thousands of Britons who, but for that cataclysm, would never have known the joys of a plunge in the Mediterranean. The beaches of Gallipoli must have

grim memories enough for the heroic survivors, but let us hope that they offered at least one pleasurable experience to those gallant hosts.

In the days before anyone dreamed of the horrors of the Dardanelles, the British Embassy at Constantinople used to spend the summer at Therapia on the Bosphorus ; and here bathing was one of the principal amusements. More than one adventurous secretary succeeded in swimming across the Straits undeterred by the strong current which sets out of the Black Sea, and in spite of the water being far colder than in the Mediterranean. But most people enjoyed a quiet swim, avoiding as far as possible the strips of melon rind which collected in the back-waters near the shore. These relics of a fruit in great esteem in the Levant were unwelcome to a fastidious swimmer. Shaped like respirators, they seemed impelled by some law of nature to try to act as such.

But you cannot float for hours in the Bosphorus without the slightest feeling of chill. For that you must go to the shores of Egypt or of Greece. Stanley Bay, not far from Ramleh, used to be a spot favoured by fashion, where not a few people were drowned during the course of the summer. With certain winds the current set strong round the little bay, and was apt to sweep the unwary off his legs. And if he could not swim, there was no Powell ready to fish him out. He had to trust to his fellow bathers, not all of whom cared to take a risk.

Moslems are not, as a rule, great bathers. Their regular ablutions keep them cleaner than many other folk, and their extreme reluctance to expose their bodies to the public gaze deters them from the pleasures of total immersion. The bathers on the Egyptian coast were, therefore, mostly Greeks and other Europeans ; and only on one occasion did I see

a number of real Egyptians in the sea. They were not bathing, but were giving the horses of a cavalry regiment a taste of salt water; and the splendid bronze torsos of the troopers sitting their bare-backed chargers in a heavy surf would have been a worthy subject for a classic Greek frieze.

We are accustomed to rules and regulations regarding bathing, though the segregation of the sexes is now considered Victorian; and readers of the late Lord Edward Cecil's delightful book, "The Leisure of an Egyptian Official," are aware that the Egyptian Government did not lack formalism in his day. In this matter of bathing there was a rule that swimmers were not to venture too far out to sea; and it must have given a zealous coastguard on a lonely part of the coast an unexpected thrill of joy when he perceived one day a man in the water nearly a mile from shore. Instantly the boat was launched and the swimmer hailed. Having asked the astonished Englishman his name and address, our bureaucrat demanded the production of his card as evidence. This was, strangely in the circumstances, not forthcoming, and the delinquent was ordered into the boat forthwith. But the swim along the coast was for a bet and the swimmer loth to give it up. So it was not till he was threatened with a blow over the head with an oar, in the interest of his own safety and of the majesty of the law, that he obeyed the order and was conveyed ashore and detained until his clothes arrived. Presumably the bet was declared off.

All amateurs, or to use a much more expressive Spanish word, *aficionados*, of bathing agree that the full flavour of the pastime is only tasted in beautiful surroundings. In this respect Greece must be given pride of place, for no other country provides such backgrounds to a sea at once so warm and limpid.

Not even the Bay of Naples can compare with her ; nor can the cooler waters of the Adriatic, backed by the stern mountains of Albania, be held to equal the *Ægean*. Greece is classic ground for the swimmer, as for all devotees of the cult of the human body in action, and it is with feelings almost of religious awe that the *aficionado* takes his first plunge into her waters.

Of all places in Greece from which to enjoy a swim surely none surpass Cape Sunium. Not that the shore is particularly friendly to the bather, for he is likely to be pricked by the dwarf oak on which he hangs his clothes, and he may cut his feet on the rocks as he warily approaches the depths. Poor creatures who attach importance to such trifles should confine themselves to the sands of Scaramanga or of Voulakmeni, where they can gambol in their depth like any Margate bathing woman. But once in the deep indigo water a hundred yards from shore, the prickles and the scratches are forgotten under the gaze of the snow-white temple of Poseidon set in the azure sky. And, as he drinks in a scene of matchless beauty, the swimmer recalls the half-forgotten lessons of his boyhood—how from this promontory the Athenians two thousand years ago watched with anxious eyes for the returning ships, and how anxiety was turned into despair by the tragic blunder of the Black Flag.

The civilisations of ancient Greece and modern Japan have many points of striking resemblance, and the writer turns naturally from the one to the other. In Japan we have the Pacific beating on the most varied shore, and the waters of the Inland Sea rivaling those of the Mediterranean. So the *aficionado* has a great choice before him. If he prefers the ocean, he can seek the beach at Hayama and enjoy a swim perfect in its kind. Or, if his tastes direct him

to tranquil waters, he can make a pilgrimage to the sacred island of Miyajima, and, wading beneath the great Torii which stand knee-deep in the sea, swim out till he has a full view of the famous temple of the three Shinto goddesses. This dip has an almost sacramental character, and may be compared without irreverence to the bathe at Sunium.

Even the wretch who prefers fresh water to salt may have his fill in Japan. The waters of Lake Chuzenji are crystal clear, and a plunge in them before breakfast will almost reconcile the true *aficionado* to their tastelessness. But the lake has an evil reputation. Strange monsters lurking in its depths are said to suck the unwary down, and it seems to be an established fact that the bodies of the drowned are never recovered. And close to Chuzenji are the hot springs of Yumoto, where the wholly depraved can boil themselves at their leisure; and, looking like lobsters fresh from the cauldron, can cool off in the village street in company with the inhabitants of both sexes.

Japan is, indeed, a paradise for bathers of every taste, and not least on account of the absence of false modesty which marks the inhabitants. In this respect the Japanese and the Moslems are as the poles apart; and, just as the latter have infected whole populations of other religions with their prejudices, so have the Japanese enlightened the Europeans who dwell in their midst. A lady who came to stay with us at Tokyo was surprised on the afternoon of her arrival when the gardener came into the drawing-room clad only in the scantiest loin cloth and, making the politest of bows, presented her with a flower. But the feeling soon wears off, and, after a short time, you cease to think it strange to meet the whole population of an out-of-the-way village in a state of nature; nor

do you ever dream of donning a bathing dress unless European ladies are present. This is a huge advantage, for a swim loses its finest bouquet when hampered with clothes.

I never heard of sharks in Japanese waters, nor am I of those intrepid bathers who hold that their presence adds zest to a plunge. At Alexandria there were constant rumours of sharks supposed to have followed the wake of ships through the Suez Canal—reports which always seemed to me to lack solid foundation. But both the Mediterranean and the North Pacific harbour less dangerous but more authentic pests. The worst of these I encountered at Hayama, in the shape of an insignificant little fish which lies on the sand in shallow water with a single spine, sharp as a needle, pointing to heaven from its back. The only function of this weapon seems to be to pierce the bare human foot, and most successfully I enabled that office to be performed. The puncture was so minute as to produce but the tiniest drop of blood; yet my leg swelled up in a few minutes to the knee, and I never felt such acute agony. In a couple of hours the swelling had gone down and the pain had disappeared. A fish with the like propensities was to be found on the beaches of Greece.

A much commoner pest in Greece was the sea-urchin. In England we are accustomed to finding him in the fossilised state, when he can be handled with impunity and even with mild pleasure by school-boys. But in Greece he is a nasty customer, who sheds his spines as soon as they are well embedded in the flesh. Thence they refuse to be withdrawn, and there they fester till the victim seeks medical aid. When bathing in Greece it is as well to touch bottom as seldom as possible unless you wear sandals.

Jelly fish are to be found in almost every sea, but

most of them, like the little crabs and cuttle-fish, only add to the pleasure of the young by providing a delicious thrill of terror and adventure. The malignant specimens have a repulsive yellow colour, and are often a foot or more across. Their appearance is a sufficient warning even to the inexperienced, but in a choppy sea they may be encountered unawares. This is a disagreeable business, for an obstinate and irritating rash may be produced by their touch. Some seaweeds have a like but milder effect; and in the Norwegian fjords unusual movements of the water will sometimes bring to the surface a seaweed capable of causing much irritation to a tender skin.

Such enemies as the limpet and the mussel form part of the rocks to which they cling, and must be avoided by the use of sandals if the bather has not acquired a sole of leather by constant walking with bare feet. They are specially dangerous when landing in a heavy sea, as I once learned to my cost. We were bathing before breakfast on the island of Raasay and had left without mishap the cement breakwater half submerged in a heavy swell. Carefully we chose the moment of landing, but we were caught by a great wave and swept along the breakwater, which was thickly garnished with molluscs. I got off fairly cheap, but my companion emerged bleeding freely from a dozen deep scratches which ran the length of his outer thigh. He walked uneasily all day with his rough tweed knickerbockers adhering to his leg. The skin is much softer in the water than out of it and scratches far more easily.

One would naturally expect that the bathing habit would become more general as the climate grows more warm, and that in the tropics and in India whole populations would live in the water. The contrary is the case, and it is safe to say that one must go to the

far north to find bathing a national pastime. In Sweden and in Norway the fjords and islands near towns are alive with people all the summer. It is true that they are devotees of the sun as much as of the sea, and spend hours stretched full length upon the rocks. In fact, a knowing hand could tell how far the season was advanced as well by a glance at the foreshore of the Oslo Fjord as by examining the foliage of the trees, for the tint of the reposing forms mellows with the passage of the weeks. Beginning pure white they pass through all the shades of pink and fiery red, till in August they attain a fine copper brown not unlike the hue of the Cingalese. They are then with difficulty distinguished from the background. They have, in fact, assumed the protective colouring which Nature provides for all her children.

Not so very long ago Norwegians did not differ much from Japanese in their independence of the aid of clothes to give them ease of bearing amongst strangers. And I well remember a stark young Viking sculling up to a small sailing yacht, full of English ladies, which lay becalmed in the fjord, and asking most politely the time of day. Some of the party had only just arrived in Norway and hid dire confusion behind a barricade of parasols, while our naked friend could not have shown more composure had he been wearing a top hat and frock coat. Having learnt that it was half-past two, he thanked us, and turning his skiff about rowed away. In those days both sexes bathed together as God made them, but now the authorities have decreed that a bathing costume must be worn within a certain radius of Oslo. The golden age has passed.

This freedom from convention in the matter of covering the body is common to all northern races, and the beaches near Petrograd offered as strange

spectacles as could anywhere be seen in Norway. Has anyone ever explained why it is that the more clothes the ordinary climate forces on you, the barer you should go when you get the chance? Perhaps the answer is implicit in the question, and the bareness is but the inevitable reaction against too thick a covering. Or does the explanation lie deeper? And can it be that these inhabitants of vast, gloomy forests and wild mountains, these dwellers by sea and lake, have remained pagans at heart and, while doing lip service to the restraints and the modest precepts of the Church, are still unconscious worshippers of Odin and of Thor? This is a supposition not lightly to be dismissed.

Many people, guided by the map, look upon Norway as a place where only polar bears and seals can bathe with enjoyment, and they will be surprised to learn that in summer the water in the Oslo Fjord is warmer than off the coast of England. Such is, nevertheless, the case, and it is not uncommon to find a temperature of over seventy for days on end in the height of summer. The lack of tide and the absence of strong winds combine with the constant sun, which only hides his face for a few hours in the twenty-four, to warm up the surface water to this agreeable point. But the warmth is superficial, and a deep dive takes you into icy regions. If the elderly bather avoids these plunges, he can enjoy himself very well in the fjord, and can cheat the thinness of his blood by basking on a seat between his swims.

The summer heat lasts only a few weeks in Norway, and the Norwegians would not be the virile race they are if they were content with this short season for their pastime. So we read without surprise that a club has been formed in Trondhjem to promote winter swimming, and it is suggested that a competition in

this exercise would make a suitable event in the next Olympic Games. The proposal may meet with some opposition from the Latin representatives, but it can scarcely fail to enlist the vigorous support of our own seasoned brigade of Christmas plungers. And, should the Olympic Committee be so prejudiced as to exclude it from the programme, we may hope to fortify Anglo-Norwegian relations in the future by an annual mid-winter contest, held alternatively in the Serpentine and the Trondhjem Fjord.

We have now been round the world, and it is time for some general considerations. The true *aficionado* samples seas as does a connoisseur his wine. He finds some merit in each brand, and the mere tasting of a new one is in itself a pleasure and an achievement. The Pacific Ocean differs from the Mediterranean as does Schloss Johannisberger from Château Yquem. The temperature at which each can best be savoured is not the same, and they must be approached in different mood. And this brings one inevitably to the vexed question of what may be called the aqueous merits of different seas.

What degree of salinity constitutes the bather's perfect blend? I dismiss at once all comparison between salt water and fresh, and mention only to hold up to contumely the benighted individuals who maintain that sea water is sticky and should be removed from the body by an insipid douche. Such people are no true bathers, they are mere washers, and should hold their tongues except when Turkish baths are being discussed. The *aficionado* must have his water salt—but how salt is the question.

Bathers in the Dead Sea are fond of telling how they bobbed about like corks upon the surface, revealing their proportions to admiring onlookers; and how their bodies whitened like Lot's wife as the hot sun

dried them. This sounds great fun, but I conclude that the Dead Sea is too saline for daily enjoyment. To bathe in it throughout the summer would be like drinking three glasses of vintage port every day for lunch. At the other end of the scale we have the Baltic, which thirsty dogs are known to lap and where fishes, uncommonly like perch from Hickling Broad, do not hesitate to show their zebra stripes. So far from floating like a cork in the Baltic, you are lucky if you do not sink like a stone, so little buoyancy has this so-called sea. The claim of the Baltic must be decisively dismissed.

There remain the oceans and the minor seas. Who shall decide between the claims of the Atlantic and the Pacific? One of the great bathes of my career was in the Atlantic. We had taken a prodigious walk in the Basque country under the heat of a July sun, when we descended on a deserted stretch of beach. There had been a gale a few days before, and an enormous swell set in from the Bay of Biscay. Into this we plunged our overheated bodies and revelled in the great waves, which now lifted us to heaven and now rolled us far up the shore. From time to time we raced along the sands to dry and warm ourselves before another bout. Finally, some strangers appeared in the distance, and we buried ourselves in the sand to the chin, our exposed faces wearing a fixed and horrid grin. We hoped that the Spaniards would take our heads for the gruesome relics of the storm, but they passed by and showed no sign of having received a shock. That was the only blot on an exquisite afternoon. My dear companion and I were neither of us diplomats in those days.

The Pacific can afford like experiences to the bather, for the two oceans rival each other in the majesty of their wave-power. In the matter of

salinity they are on a par, both having the full flavour required by the *aficionado* and a fine measure of buoyancy; and their waters are equally stainless. In short, it is impossible to discriminate between the aqueous qualities of these noble competitors.

The minor seas are more divergent in their attributes. The North Sea has her admirers amongst the full-blooded, but the experienced bather can hardly admit her claim to pre-eminence. She lacks the limpidity essential to superlative quality, while her frigid embrace offers neither the generous welcome of the ocean nor the sensuous charm of warmer waters. With her untimely moods she is the jade amongst seas; or, to return to our former simile, a bottle of clouded hock which has stood too long upon the ice. The Black Sea is but an inferior Mediterranean, not so salt and colder to the touch.

The Caspian deserves more notice from bathers than she has received. Her salinity is beyond reproach, but not so exaggerated as to permit of cork-like antics on her surface. Her wave-power is respectable and her warmth undeniable; but her waters are less translucent than those of her classic rival. We must, then, give the palm to the Mediterranean for her aqueous qualities as we have done for her setting. She is the example of the classic virtue of the *via media*, not so salt as to coat your body after a dip, but salt enough to whiten your blue bathing dress as it dries on the rocks. She is the queen of minor seas, with her splendid buoyancy, her perfect purity, and her caressing warmth.

Whatever opinion he may hold as to the proper place of woman in the world of politics or of sport, no authoritative bather will deny that she is in her element in the water. Here she is as supreme as in the ball-room or the home. For some physiological

reason she bears the cold touch of the sea with greater fortitude than man. We have seen it a hundred times ourselves, and do not need to be convinced by the fact that in the shell-fisheries of Japan women divers are considered superior to men. In actual swimming, women display a co-ordinated and harmonious vigour of which they show little trace in other athletic exercises ; and a well-grown girl will more often than not beat an older boy both for speed and endurance. We have seen how important æsthetic considerations are in this matter of bathing, and who is so morose as to deny that the shapely forms of the fair give additional charm to the scene ? The old Greeks knew their business when they conjured Aphrodite from the waves.

Even in the art of diving many young women can boast a grace and boldness which their brothers might envy ; but it must be admitted that, in this sphere, female influence is not always what one would wish. There is a tendency amongst a number of the sex to enter the water gingerly when circumstances permit, not to say invite, a resolute plunge. The excuse used to be the discomfort of wetting the hair, which no cap seems properly to protect. But we notice that, now so much of the hair has been sacrificed to fashion, there is no corresponding decrease in the number of those who wet themselves inch by inch. In our school-days " shirking in " was a dire offence appropriately punished by ingenious tortures. If you could not dive head-first, you had to flop or jump in or take unpleasant consequences. This is the proper spirit for bathers of either sex. They may at first smart over a considerable superficies of the body after impact with the surface of the sea, but they will not know the full possibilities of the bathe unless they disregard this temporary inconvenience and earn the

plaudits of the party by describing a graceful parabola in the air.

It would be beyond the scope of this chapter to deal with the religious significance of bathing, as exemplified by the Ganges and the font. Volumes might be written on this side of the subject alone. Nor has the writer attempted to deal with waters beyond his personal ken ; and he must leave others to describe the delights of the Florida and California beaches, the Sydney Heads, the surf of the South Sea Islands, and the sophisticated pleasures of the Lido. He has not felt competent to discuss the hygienic point of view, to decide in what manner suspended salts enter and affect the human system, or how the body reacts to ultra-violet rays. This aspect of bathing is especially dear to our Teutonic friends, and it may well be studied at the Gänse-Häufel, where thousands of worshippers at the shrine of the Goddess of Health draw inspiration from continuous exposure alternatively to the air of Vienna and the water of the Danube.

The young care for none of these things, and, as we said at the beginning of the chapter, bathing is pre-eminently the passion of the young. If those in advancing middle age reflect on their bathing careers, they will find that it is upon the swims of their youth that they dwell most fondly. They may agree in theory with the decided views put forward here as to the respective merits of salt water and of fresh, of this sea and of that ; but, if they cooled their hot youth in English inland streams, they will think in their hearts that nothing ever can quite equal a morning plunge in Parson's Pleasure, in Gunner's Hole, or Cuckoo Weir. For many these names hold a magic not to be exorcised by the voice of reason or of experience.



Ridley Bonchgarinsk. 27.

CHAPTER V

THE TAKING OF DUCKS

"Look how a bird lies tangl'd in a net."

THE pursuit of ducks stirs the imagination of most youthful sportsmen more than that of almost any other bird. The harmonious and brilliant plumage, the nocturnal and amphibious habits, the sudden and mysterious migrations, the rapid yet ordered flight, and the numerous varieties of the duck tribe combine to endow them with a special fascination for the adolescent gunner. And, if he is familiar with the writings of Christopher Davies or brought up on the pages of Colonel Peter Hawker, he may well find himself more than half hypnotised by the power of suggestion exercised by those distinguished authors. Not that the two should be mentioned in the same breath ; for the Colonel has long joined the ranks of those classic writers whose established fame knows no limits of time or space ; whereas Mr Davies makes his special appeal to the small, if eminently distinguished, circle of naturalists and sportsmen who are affectionately familiar with the Broads and estuaries of Norfolk.

The strictures of the Colonel on the habits of rival sportsmen and his marked hostility to the shore-snobs and gent.'s-from-town, whose miserable pop-guns interfered with the successful use of his double stanchion, appealed especially to my early fancy ; and nothing

would have gratified me quite so much as to fire a couple of pounds of mould shot into a flock of widgeon myself. But I never had the good fortune to launch a punt. The nearest we came to it was to mount an old four-bore, or barrel of about that calibre, on a light wheeled carriage, and attempt to set up to the fowl scattered on the mud of a Scottish sea-loch. The discharge resulted in the death of two curlews and a nasty cut on the cheek of my undergraduate host ; and the field piece never came out again.

While the gallant Colonel, as befits a Peninsular veteran, dreams of mass slaughter by means of ever more effective propellants and lower trajectories, the more peaceful East Anglian excites our murderous instincts by his tales of phenomenal takes of fowl without shot fired. Whether duck decoys were first constructed in this district, I am not competent to say, but some of the very few still working in the British Isles are to be found in Norfolk and Suffolk, catching their thousands in the season to this day. There used to be one tucked away amongst the giant rhododendrons bordering a secluded bay of Virginia Water. This was, of course, a Royal decoy, and it would be interesting to know which of our sovereigns first had a taste for taking fowl in this fashion. The last time I saw it was many years ago, and it then seemed to be falling into disrepair. Great crested grebes used to build close by, and the only pied fly-catcher I ever saw in the south of England flitted, one early spring day, amongst the oak trees bordering a broad, grassy ride not a hundred yards off.

There is something mysterious and sinister in the precincts and the working of a decoy. The complete seclusion in which the pool, or at any rate the immediate surroundings, are guarded ; the construction of the pipe of netting, lofty, broad, and inviting at its

mouth, gradually narrowing and lowering till it ends in the dark trap of death ; the cunning curve, which hides from future victims, still disporting in the sun, the fate of their companions ; the treacherous decoy ducks, swimming placidly up the fatal water-way ; the little fox-like dog exciting by his innocent gambols the curiosity of the feckless fowl ; the reek of the burning peat bemusing the senses like some heathen incense ; and the silent, stealthy movements of the arch-villains of the piece—all these lend an atmosphere of ancient tragedy to what is, in reality, but a manifestation of modern commercial enterprise.

Most old civilisations arose, for a number of interesting reasons, in districts where cultivation was carried on by means of irrigation ; and such places always abound in wild-fowl. Thus, it is no surprise to find amongst the sculptures of ancient Egypt not a few depicting the various methods of capturing what must have been an important source of food supply. At Thebes we may see the picture of an Egyptian sportsman and note with approval that his ideas were essentially modern, though his weapons were of his own time. Instead of a gun he has a throwing stick, but he is accompanied by a loader, whose attitude proves that he has been properly trained to hand his master a fresh stick without loss of time. In place of the orthodox retriever at his feet, a cat fawns against his leg ; but it may be doubted whether this animal plunged into the water to retrieve the game.

The carvings show us, too, that the Ancients were acquainted with the advantages of decoy ducks. Our sportsman has one seated in the prow of his boat, resting after its work is done, while the missile is being hurled ; or, perhaps in this case, waiting to exercise its fascination later in the day. There is no

evidence to show that anything like the modern decoy was known to the ancient Egyptians ; and, for purposes of mass slaughter, they seem to have relied on clap nets and contrivances of that kind, which we find depicted on their walls. Here, no doubt, the decoy bird also played its part, though I can find no direct evidence of it. Though hawks are amongst the birds most often portrayed in stone, they owed their popularity to their sacred character and not to their practical use. The sport of falconry seem to have been unknown to the ancient Egyptians. Its stronghold at the present day is in Eastern Asia, where it must have been practised from immemorial times, and whence it spread to the West. It is unlikely that the Romans, who had hardly heard of the art, introduced it into Egypt ; and it was, in all probability, brought in by the Arabs who are adepts at it, but who, in Egypt at least, restrict themselves in this respect to desert game. The duck of the Nile have many a peregrine to dread in the course of the winter, but none flown from human fist.

The modern Egyptians, as Milner pointed out in his immortal book, do nothing in the same way as other people, and it hardly surprised me when I learnt, soon after my arrival in the country, that they found it unnecessary to bait their hooks in order to catch the unappetising Nile fish. The bare hook working in the stream was sufficient lure. So it is in this matter of taking ducks. The present-day fellah scorns nets and traps and makes use of a device of his own. He covers his head with an old basket or a large gourd, and thus equipped, plunges into some shallow lake. Nothing is visible but the head-dress, apparently floating on the surface, as he cautiously makes his way towards the fowl. When within reach he seizes a single bird by the legs and draws it under water.

The victim is drowned without a sound and with hardly a ripple to disturb the rest.

Lake Menzaleh was said to be a favourite hunting ground, but I must confess that I have never myself witnessed this peculiar method of fowling. If the evidence were not so unimpeachable, I should have been inclined to doubt the possibility of actually getting within arm's length of wild-fowl without detection. For Colonel Hawker is emphatic on their keen power of scent, and he was such an accurate and experienced observer that it is hardly possible to doubt that he was right. Now, as all deer-stalkers know, it is risky to approach very close to keen-scented animals even when the wind is right, and to seize a duck with the hand without causing uneasiness, if not to the particular victim at least to some of his companions on a side wind, seems an almost impossible operation. However, there it is.

There is something specially stirring in coming quite unawares on any object or proceeding of great beauty or interest, and I shall not forget my first view of Leeds Castle. I had never even heard of the place until, rounding a corner on a bicycle one June morning in the early nineties, I suddenly saw it before me in all its exquisite beauty. I could not understand why every one did not know of it, and overlooked the fact that most people did. It is a far cry from the Kentish lanes to the Caspian shore, but I had something of the same kind of pleased surprise when, standing on the sands of Mazanderan, I saw bunch after bunch of ducks rise from each sandy headland and circle back in order to pitch a few hundred yards inland. Here was something quite unexpected, of which I had never heard; for there was in the phenomenon a method which betrayed the directing mind of man.

The Caspian, as every schoolboy knows, lies eighty

feet below the level of the ocean, and is bounded on the south by Persia ; and, as the autumn set in, I was tempted to desert the parching aridity of the great plateau, which comprises most of the country and on which the capital is situated, in favour of the luxuriant vegetation of the little known maritime province of Mazanderan. The buttress of the central tableland on the north is the Elburz range ; and the difference of the two worlds which lie on either side of it is one of the most striking phenomena in the domain of climatic geography. On the one side we have an illimitable arid expanse, upon the face of which no tree can grow unless perennially watered, while the atmosphere is such that the bread-and-butter slices of drawing-room tea parch and curl up as you look at them, and where, sweat as you will, your shirt is always as dry as when you put it on ; and on the other side, a narrow strip of land steaming with the warm breath of the Caspian and rank with a vegetation of tropical luxuriance.

The contrast is striking enough to the European, but the Persian of the plateau, who has never crossed the Elburz, finds in Mazanderan a wholly new and disconcerting world. My shikarchi Bakhshiali was in this case, and his troubles began as soon as we reached the trees. He was continually tripping up, getting scratched in the face, and having his hard round felt hat knocked off by a branch. This last indignity, exposing his shaven pate to the jeers of his companions, roused his ire more than anything else. Especially was he out of his element in the pursuit of game. His eyesight, unusually quick to pick up a distant ibex or wild sheep on a bare hill-side, was apparently confused by the presence of inanimate objects, and it was with difficulty that one could point out to him a quite obvious animal in a clearing.

Nor was he of the slightest assistance in marking down a bird in scrub. Bakhshiali was, in short, an interesting example of the uselessness of specialised faculties in an unaccustomed environment.

As you drop from the bare Persian upland to the narrow, steamy belt bordering the sea, you first pass through a zone of magnificent beech forests, rapidly succumbing to the axe of the charcoal burner. Here grow the finest box-trees in the world and a wealth of medlars dear to the numerous brown bears. It is here, too, that the great Caspian red deer still survives ; and sounders of wild swine, free from molestation from the Mohammedan villagers, perform their natural function of supplying the larders of a rare tiger and of the plentiful leopards. The snow partridge is soon left behind, and his place is first taken by the rock partridge, a bird like a glorified Frenchman, with a powerful flight and peculiarly dry on the table. Lower down the grey partridge of our own turnip fields replaces the red-leg, and, if you are lucky, you may dine off a Persian pheasant, progenitor of the multitudes which stock our home coverts. So you pass through the narrow belt of flat, marshy land and pitch your camp on the dry sands of the Caspian shore from which we started this digression.

The sight of the sea excited Bakhshiali beyond measure, and when I insisted on a good swim he thought that Sheitan had clearly claimed one of his own. Nor was it easy to persuade the men to pitch my tent on the sand itself, and it needed all my authority to convince them that the sea would not swallow us up in the night. There is, of course, no tide in the Caspian, but the second tent was, nevertheless, pitched a hundred yards inland from mine. It was in October, and the autumn migration was in progress. Flocks of fowl of many sorts were passing continuously

along the coast, but none equalled in strange beauty a great herd of flamingoes which, flying low over the waves, dyed the whole surface rosy-pink. It was while watching this phenomenon that I first noticed the strange rise and fall of the little bunches of ducks from the sandy headlands.

Next day, as we marched eastwards along the shore, the mystery was explained. The Persians make shelters on the headlands in which they conceal themselves and a basket of tame ducks. As a wild flock approaches the birds are released, fly a hundred feet or so into the air and curl back to settle on a small artificial pond inland. The object is to attract the passing flock down to the pond, which is quite small, perhaps twenty yards across, and surrounded by a low box hedge. Here other fowlers lie in wait with large hand-nets. It was most amusing to watch a flock of wild birds flying along the coast and saluted as it passed each headland by a little puff of ducks, but it was disappointing that during two days' march we did not see a single wild bird succumb to the blandishments of the decoys.

We visited several of the ponds, and were assured that ducks were taken in this way ; and so they must be, one would think, or such elaborate arrangements would not be made. But is it possible that the real object of all these preparations is to lure one's neighbour's tame ducks to the fatal pond ? It would be in keeping with the well-developed Persian sense of humour ; and it is conceivable that this strange method of taking ducks is but a Mazanderani variation of what is a common form of amusement in the towns of the tableland. Here flocks of tame pigeons are kept and specially trained to bring neighbouring birds home to their dovecot. Why should not ducks be used in the same way, and the salute to the passing

wild-fowl be a mere traditional gesture, like the shaking of hands when the guests arrive, or the resounding thigh-thwacks of a pair of Japanese wrestlers before a bout?

No doubt the Japanese learnt from China various methods of capturing ducks, but the only one I ever saw practised by them was of their own invention. At the time when the great revolution changed old Japan into a modern state, no European Court was complete unless it could offer to the foreign representatives some form of sport of a more or less ceremonial kind, suited to the dignity and limited activity of Ambassadors or Ministers. Thus at Vienna the Hofjagd provided the diplomatic corps with opportunities of showing their skill with the gun, and, incidentally, of affording much innocent amusement to the more practised participants. At Berlin, Petersburg, and Paris entertainments of a similar, if less entertaining, kind were provided, and it would never have done for Tokyo to lag behind. Now there is no shooting to speak of in the vicinity of the latter capital, and the Japanese evolved out of their own heads a novel and attractive substitute eminently suited to the object in view. In short, they invented a manner of taking wild-fowl in which a large number of people could not only participate without fatigue, but could show themselves to the greatest advantage in the matter of costume without detriment either to the sport or to their own comfort. Even ladies could enliven the proceedings by their presence and their well-informed observations.

About two hours by car from Tokyo and near the sea there is a pond of some four acres or so, which is crammed with fowl all the winter. The pond is surrounded by a thick belt of bamboo and fir-trees, which completely hide it. Through this belt ditches

are constructed, which debouch into a pleasant open meadow. The ditches, which are about thirty yards apart and parallel, have an elbow in the thicket so that it is not possible to see down them to the pond. In the meadow a thin line of covert is planted midway between them, and they are about three feet wide and perhaps a little more than three feet deep from the surface of the water to the top of the bank. At the point where they leave the thicket is a falling hatch of wire-netting which can be let down to prevent the ducks swimming back above or under water. At the end of each ditch, about twenty yards from the thicket, is an earth mound about fifteen feet high and four times as broad as the ditch. In the middle of this mound is a wooden door with a narrow horizontal slit, through which it is possible to peep straight down the twenty yards of ditch which lies in the meadow. There is also a small shoot through which grain can be poured into the ditch without disturbance to the ducks. There are two sets of ditches, of about half a dozen each, on opposite sides of the pond to suit the wind, and it should be mentioned that tame decoy ducks are in the ditches. Well to the rear stands a delightful Japanese pavilion.

Such is the setting of this truly original sport. On the occasion here described there were forty of us, about the same number as used to take part in the Vienna Hofjagd. Having all arrived and shaken hands, we were divided into teams of eight, and armed with large nets with handles six feet long. We were a motley crew as we left the pavilion: dapper Japanese looking eminently workmanlike in their dark blue suits; a southern diplomat in a voluminous black fur coat and with a nasty cough; ladies in thin shoes, rustling silk "foundations" and enormous hats; other ladies suitably dressed, and men of every

nationality in such costumes as are dear to the cosmopolitan sportsman's heart.

Led by a Japanese, we tripped as silently as might be over the damp meadow to the back of the nearest mound. Our guide, having peered through the slit to see if any wild-fowl were in the ditch, motioned the first team into action. Divided into two lots of four, they stole from behind the mound down each side of the ditch and about ten yards from it. They were halted about four yards apart, and in the meantime a Japanese keeper had crept along till he was opposite the trap-door next the thicket. They were thus all completely hidden by the banks from the fowl in the ditch.

At a silent signal the "nets" and the keeper closed on the ditch. The fowl, after a moment's frightened hesitation, rose into the air, and were either taken or missed, like butterflies. At the same time a Japanese sprang on to the mound to intercept any duck that might break back, and another stood by with a goshawk on a leash which he loosed if a favourable chance offered. Having dealt with the first ditch, the team returned, and another eight took its place, until all the ditches had been tried, by which time the first ditch very likely had fresh ducks in it.

It will be readily understood that success depends entirely on complete silence. When the Japanese are alone, or with a few favoured guests, not a sound is made from start to finish, and hardly a duck escapes. Sometimes as many as two hundred are taken in an afternoon. Very different was it on the present occasion. Besides the throaty sounds emanating from the depths of the fur coat and the rustling of silk, there was no little clashing of nets and smothered exclamations of triumph or disappointment from the excited sportsmen. The decoy ducks, too, came in

for an amount of attention, which must have surprised them; for, long after the wild ones had gone their way, they were being hunted along the surface of the water or laid entangled in a net at the feet of a polite but deprecating Japanese official. In all the circumstances it was surprising that our bag numbered fifty-six head, not counting decoys. Of these, forty-one were teal, twelve widgeon, and three mallard. My wife caught a widgeon, and the Ambassadors a mallard.

It was most instructive to look through the slit when the "nets" closed on the ditch. Perhaps there would be half a dozen fowl in it, rather uneasy, but not seriously alarmed. When the enemy suddenly appeared right above them, they all without exception dived like a flash, and those nearest the far end would probably have escaped but for the wire-netting hatch. On reappearing after a second or two, they rose straight into the air, and it was really impossible for anyone, who kept his head and had the use of his limbs, to miss them with the net. It was, indeed, a simple matter to secure two if the chance offered. But this was not what happened when I was a spectator. The sportsmen, in their eagerness, missed the almost stationary birds completely, and, their eyes attracted by the ducks still on the water, turned their attention to the decoys. In this way many birds escaped, and, flying across the next ditch, made other fowl uneasy. The Japanese gentleman on the mound, on the other hand, performed surprising feats of skill. He only had the chance of taking birds in full flight, regular rocketers in fact, and I did not see one missed which came within reach. They were mostly teal, too, which soon get up their speed.

The presence of the goshawk added a picturesque touch to the whole proceedings. She was on a leash some fifty yards long, and I saw her cast off twice.

The first time she took a widgeon after a flight of about fifteen yards. The quarry had no pace on, and the hawk bound to its back and brought it at once to the ground. The second time the leash caught in a bush and a teal escaped. The leash was necessary to prevent the hawk following the quarry over the belt and disturbing the pond. This pond was a wonderful sight as seen through a special peep-hole through the covert. It was absolutely crammed with fowl, and the banks lined with them. They were, as far as I could see, nearly all teal, with a sprinkling of widgeon and mallard. For this sport a crowded pool is probably required, or sufficient ducks would not find their way up the ditches. The Japanese estimated their number on this occasion at fifteen thousand, and I could well believe it.



Ridley, Maryland. 37.

CHAPTER VI

SKI-RUNNING IN NORWAY

“What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen !
What old December's bareness everywhere !”

It is not so many years ago that the word “ski” was unknown outside Norway ; and I remember, when I was in St Moritz in February 1897, that there was only one person there, an Englishman and an old Wykehamist, who practised the pastime of ski-ing. The Kulm Hotel possessed one pair of ski, and, encouraged by this lonely exponent, I hired them, and wallowed in the deep snow near the hotel for about three afternoons in succession. Four years later I hired the only pair of ski at the Semmering, near Vienna ; but, this time, my experiences lasted but half an hour, and ended with a nasty toss, which broke one of the ski and obliged me to purchase the other. Bulgaria is a country which contains some fine ski-ing ground ; and a heavy fall of snow in January 1910 tempted me again to try my luck on the lower slopes of Mount Vitosh outside Sofia. In the course of two afternoons I reached the necessary pitch of skill to keep my legs over easy ground when travelling fairly fast. This was my undoing ; for, swishing down the long slope with ever-growing and uncontrolled speed, my feet diverged, and I pitched on my shoulder on a place blown almost bare of snow. For six months I could not put on an overcoat without help, but it was with undiminished enthusiasm

that I bought my first proper ski-ing outfit when I came to Norway in February 1912.

In Norway ski have been in use as a means of progression from time immemorial. Professor Nansen says they came from Asia, like everything else good, bad, and indifferent, and that some variety of ski is used by all the aboriginal inhabitants of the Polar Basin. But, as a pastime, ski-ing is not much older in Norway than in the rest of Europe. The sudden development of a workaday instrument, used only by woodmen and villagers on their winter tramps, into a highly-specialised "sports article," employed by an international public of both sexes as a means of violent recreation, was due to the inventive genius of an individual. Just as the man who introduced the iron axe into Norway unwittingly changed the face of the whole country and the lives of the natives for ever, by enabling them to master the forests ; so this other individual caused new towns of hotels and villas to spring up in the most outlandish places, new railways to be built, new rich to blossom, and revolutionised the winter existence of hundreds of thousands, if not of millions, by teaching them how to fix ski firmly to the boot. That is the whole secret of the business. The earlier ski were not fixed, and came off at the smallest provocation ; and it was not till Dr Huitfeldt popularised a good fixed binding, that it was possible to travel freely at speed and to cut those capers without which ski-running would be but humdrum work.

This is no place to write the history of ski-ing, nor have I the necessary qualifications to do so, but it is interesting to record that the oldest ski-club in the world celebrated its fiftieth anniversary on 23rd February 1927. The Christiania Ski-Club was founded in 1877 by some enthusiasts, one of whom is happily

still a member, with the object of popularising the sport amongst the youth of the capital. The Club succeeded in doing far more than this; for, besides laying the foundation of the great National Ski-ing Association, which has branches all over Norway, it was the first to build a hut in the depth of the forests for the use of those members who wished to spend a week-end ski-ing. The President of the Club from 1888 to 1927, who was one of its founders, was the same gentleman who, under the name of "Mr Thomas," entertained, with such hospitality, the authors of "Three in Norway by Two of Them," when they fished his lake of Rusvand. He died in June 1927, to the lasting sorrow of the many English friends who had admired his sterling qualities and experienced his boundless kindness. The name of Thomas Fearnley should be coupled with that of Huitfeldt as a father of ski-ing.

The building of this hut set a fashion which has given to Norwegian ski-ing much of its particular savour. One of the first to follow suit was, appropriately enough, the son of our old friend of Rusvand. When still in his teens, he collected a few friends of his own age, and founded the "Fram" Club, which claims to be the fourth oldest ski-club in the world, and is certainly second to none in hospitality. In due course a hut was built, not far from the first of its kind; and others quickly followed until, at the present time, the whole of the vast forest, covering the mountains for thirty miles north of Oslo, is peppered with ski-huts, built by clubs and associations of all kinds. These huts are of very varying sizes and degrees of comfort, but they are all built, more or less, on the same plan, and they present an appearance admirably in harmony with their surroundings. The walls are of longitudinal logs, cut on

the spot and caulked with moss ; the roof is of birch bark, on which is superimposed a thick layer of earth ; and the interior consists of one sitting-room, a kitchen, and bedrooms with several beds in each room. The sitting-room is always comparatively large ; and the feature of the whole hut is the great open fireplace, built of stone, which always fills one corner of the room with a blaze of logs. Sometimes there is a tiny cellar under the floor, but, when prohibition was introduced, it became out of the question to keep alcoholic drink in any place not constantly watched—and most of the huts are untenanted during the week.

To these huts parties of men, of all ages, may be seen streaming through the woods any Saturday afternoon in the winter. They are burdened with knapsacks, containing their share of the food and drink required and any spare clothes they may need. For the invariable arrangement is that one member of the party organises the victualling, and comes to terms with the others as to what they will contribute. Guests, of course, are not expected to bring any contribution ; but, when stocks of whisky (wine was allowed under prohibition in Norway) were running down, the exercise of a diplomatic privilege did nothing to diminish one's welcome ; and I usually carried a bottle or two, wrapped up in pyjamas or a flannel shirt, for the benefit of my hosts. My Norwegian friends would think absolutely nothing of such an addition to a knapsack twice as heavy as mine ever was, but I confess that I never reached my destination yet without a profound sigh of relief that there were no breakages.

The party drops in by twos and threes, the ringing noise of ski clapped smartly together, to rid them of snow, announcing each fresh arrival to those already round the fire. The last man very likely carries a

lighted lantern, though how, even with its help, he manages to negotiate the not too easy runs in the dark is a mystery known only to Norwegians. The foreign guest might well expect that the dinner, which is being prepared either by a girl brought in from a neighbouring farm or by the more expert of the hosts themselves, would be a very simple affair—especially as the range is of the smallest and is fed with birch wood. But Norwegians take an intelligent interest in their food, and leave nothing to chance when there are friends to be entertained. The dinner is invariably excellent, and the wine superior to that offered in London by any except hosts with well-kept cellars.

This taste for good wine, the characteristic mark of an urbane culture, is traditional in Oslo, as it used to be, and perhaps still is, in Edinburgh and Dublin; and, like those capitals, Oslo prefers fine clarets and Burgundies to all others. During and after dinner, jocular speeches are the thing; the principal guest having to wind up by thanking his entertainers. Then cards are played or conversation carried on, often until two o'clock in the morning. Next day, after a late breakfast, the party returns to the town on ski; some by the quickest and easiest path, others by some long and difficult way through the woods.

Such is the convivial side of ski-ing in Norway; but these huts serve also more businesslike purposes. From Nordmarken, the district north of Oslo, they have spread over the face of Norway. Touring clubs have put them up in the heart of Jotunheim and of the Hardanger waste, to give shelter to ski-runners on long trips; and private individuals have constructed them far above the tree line, in order to enjoy a ski-ing holiday at Easter. For, in this northern country, Easter is the only holiday time when the high ground can be enjoyed on ski. At Christmas the

weather is too severe, and the days are too short, for any but the hardiest to venture above the trees, and some of the highest hotels do not even open before mid-February. March is really the best month for high-ground ski-ing, and no one able to take his holiday in that month should wait for Easter. For it is then a point of honour for every good townsman to get burned brick-red or brown by the strong sun off the snow; and the trains, hotels, and huts are so crowded during the short holiday that a foreigner suffers some discomfort. It was suggested in an earlier chapter that this craving for the sun, of which the Easter exodus is but the first manifestation of the year, may possibly be a survival of pagan beliefs which still linger on in other directions. Or it may be that the long winter has produced a subconscious need of those ultra-violet rays which, we are told, are so abundantly present on the snow-clad surface at high altitudes.

This chapter is devoted to ski-ing in Norway, but most English readers will be better acquainted with the sport in Switzerland, and may expect some kind of comparison between the two. My experience of winter in the latter country is confined to the three afternoons already mentioned, but conversations with friends and acquaintances lead me to venture on a sketch of the leading characteristics of ski-ing there. The hotels are numerous, large, first-class in every way, and full of a gay cosmopolitan public which expects, and finds, the evening amusements of the Ritz. The mountains are high, very steep, easily accessible by means of numerous railways, and covered with beautiful, powdery snow, into which you sink just sufficiently to give your ski a good grip. The weather is nearly always calm and bright. Ordinary expeditions take the form of a progress, by some means other

than one's own muscles, to a point high above the hotel, and a return down hills too steep to run straight, during which telemarks are executed, more or less successfully as the case may be. Longer expeditions offer the attractions and dangers of regular mountaineering, and require corresponding knowledge and experience. Spare time is put in practising these telemarks, and every other conceivable form of turn, for proficiency in which badges are awarded, after tests of various degrees of difficulty have been successfully passed before properly accredited judges.

If the above sketch has any resemblance to reality, ski-ing in Switzerland and Norway are as the poles apart. For in Norway, as I can testify through long personal experience, the picture would have to be repainted as follows. The hotels, which are small and not at all luxurious, though clean and providing good food, are frequented principally by Norwegians and other Scandinavians, whose demands for indoor amusements are modest. The mountains are of rounded formation, rising above extensive high plateaux, and they are inaccessible except by climbing on ski. The snow is often so hard that ski only leave behind the faintest trace, a condition due to the strong winds which are prevalent. Ordinary excursions comprise a round of several tops with a mixture of climbing, going on the flat, and running straight down-hill at speeds up to the limit of endurance. Longer expeditions are free from the danger of avalanches, and, save very exceptionally, entail no skill in pure mountaineering. Spare time is passed in practising jumping on hills of various sizes, and the only form of competition is in jumping. Personally, I have rarely seen a Norwegian do a telemark, except when stopping after a jump.

It must not be supposed from the above description

that mountain ski-ing in Norway is a tame affair. The very fact that the mountains are so much less steep than in Switzerland makes it possible to go down them with less precautions, and the speed attained on the long, sweeping slopes by a bold and skilful man can hardly be surpassed anywhere. It is scarcely realised by the runner himself, until he falls in mid-career and picks himself up a good twenty yards from where he sat down. The consistency of the snow on the more exposed faces is disconcerting to a newcomer. The strong winds bind it together and lend to it the formation peculiar to wet sands when the tide is out. The rattle of the ski over the marble-like ripples is at first alarming, but the surface is not shiny, and the ski bite just sufficiently for you to be able to keep them together without a side slip. A fall at speed on such snow is less to be feared than the visitor would apprehend; for, though apparently so hard, it has great latent elasticity, and there is little fear of twisting a joint. Heavy snow, into which the ski may embed themselves firmly when you fall, is far more dangerous.

On the slopes which turn their backs to the prevailing winds, there is usually soft snow which, it must be admitted, comes often as a welcome relief. The Hardanger Jokel offers a fine example in both kinds. The first great sweep from the top is usually hard, and, your ski rattling like castanets, you gather a tremendous speed, which slackens off as you approach the edge of the shoulder of the mountain. Here the slope steepens, but is nearly always soft; and it is a glorious sight to see a Norwegian, with feet locked together and standing straight as a dart, shoot like a tracer-bullet far down into the valley below.

In Norway the weather is more fickle than in Central Europe, and herein lies that spice of danger

without which no sport is supposed to be complete. Especially in the Hardanger district and towards the west, storms of great severity blow up with little warning ; and the party may suddenly find themselves unable to see even a few yards through the driving snow and mist. In the Jotunheim the weather is more stable, but no one should go out on any expedition on the high ground without a compass, some food, spare muffler, gloves, and wind-coat in his knapsack, or unaccompanied by experienced mountain runners. I remember, years ago, being one of a large party caught in such a storm soon after starting from Finse for the Hardanger Jokel. The wind blew so hard that it confused the senses, and the drifting snow made it impossible either to see more than a couple of yards ahead, or to perceive whether the ground on which we stood was rising or falling. We turned back at once, and most of the party disappeared instantly from view of each other down a steep and unexpected bank. The hotel was less than a mile off and in full view when the storm came on ; but there were some not too experienced ladies present, and it has always been a matter of surprise that all got safely and quickly home.

Other meteorological phenomena, more enjoyable than these storms, but equally reminiscent of stories of polar travel, are not infrequently to be observed on the Hoifjeld. One of these is the formation of tiny ice crystals in the air in very cold, still sunny weather. These crystals in no manner obscure the perfect clarity of the atmosphere, but appear as shining specks, like motes of dust in a beam of sun in a room. Another phenomenon I only saw once. The sun appeared to be surrounded by a broad ring of light at some distance from its circumference. In this ring were three mock suns, one above and one at each side of the true sun,

but none below it, and outside the first ring, containing the three suns, was another fainter ring of the colours of the rainbow, incomplete at top and bottom. The air at the time was full of the ice crystals already mentioned ; but, though I have many times seen these latter, this is the only occasion on which they were accompanied by any other phenomenon.

Such is the general aspect of ski-ing above the tree-line in Norway ; but, for every Norwegian who enjoys this variety of the sport, there are a hundred whose activities are confined to lower wooded ground. And the classic field for this form of ski-ing is the great tract of timbered hills and lakes lying to the north of the capital. Here is the only opportunity in the country of saving time and effort by the use of mechanical transport, for there is a mountain railway which lands the Oslo ski-runner about four miles from the town and fifteen hundred feet above the sea in half an hour. And from this point, on Sundays and holidays, some twenty thousand people of both sexes launch themselves into the woods. About as many more make their way out, on a fine Sunday, without using the railway.

It may be imagined that such crowds, starting from one point, produce peculiar effects. They do not, of course, all go the same way once they are off ; but the herd, or sheep, instinct is sufficiently strong to take the vast majority down the main paths. Engineers and motorists are familiar with the tendency of modern roads to corrugate under heavy traffic, but it is in the more plastic medium of beaten snow that the finest examples of corrugated formation are to be found. As the snow deepens with the advancing season, and as the effect of the passing thousands of ski accumulates, the main paths are as the billows of the North Sea. Crest succeeds crest, and trough

follows trough; sometimes at considerable intervals, sometimes, especially at the bottom of a steep incline, hard upon one another; but, providentially, never at corners.

It is the existence of these bumps, coupled with the hard, beaten surface and sharp turns, which give to ski-ing in Nordmarken a character of its own. There is no question of keeping the feet together or following other orthodox prescriptions. The expert has his feet a good twelve inches or more apart, and, keeping fairly low, with his head almost as still as a good golfer's, he clings tight to the surface with his ski, by perfectly timed flexions of the knees. To watch such a one, with a stick tucked away under each arm, flying in perfect poise down a bumpy slope on a fast day, taking the corners with a slight skid or a couple of quick side-steps, is indeed a revelation and a pleasure. And the revelation loses nothing of its truth, though the pleasure becomes dimmed in retrospect, when the visitor follows and, after negotiating a couple of billows with increasing contortions, loses touch with the solid snow on the crest of the third and lands in a heap in the trough of the fourth or fifth.

On holidays, indeed, the uninitiated does well to avoid Nordmarken except in the guise of sightseer; for it adds nothing to that self-confidence which is the first essential to keeping the balance, to know that a dozen rivals are on his very heels. He does not realise that, if he falls, he will probably come to no harm; for the more active of his pursuers will spring over his prostrate form, or avoid him by a side-step, if there is only six inches of free space. The ladies and the elderly will sit incontinently down, with their ski across the line of march, and, at the worst, will push him harmlessly a little farther down the slope. In no case will a word of recrimination be heard, for

every one is expected to look after himself out ski-ing in Norway, and it is the worst possible form to complain of the clumsiness of others.

On week-days, on the other hand, Nordmarken is a paradise. The beaten paths can be avoided if there has been no fall of snow to soften them since the previous Sunday, and new tracks can be made, or less used ones followed, for miles with map and compass. The trees shield you from the wind, except when crossing some lake, or the snow-covered meadows of a rare upland "sæter"; and, in sunny weather, few prospects are more pleasing than that of the great silent woodland, seen from some high clearing, stretching away until the forest-clad hills melt against the distant snow mountains. In the foreground the spruce take on fantastic shapes; some bent to the ground by the weight of snow, and others standing, draped from top to toe, like ghosts of women in their shrouds.

This chapter would be even more incomplete than it is without a word as to the competitive side of Norwegian ski-ing, which has been kept quite free from the taint of professionalism. The ideal of the Norwegian in the whole sport is to combine skill in jumping with speed and endurance across country. Thousands of purely jumping competitions take place during the winter; but all the principal meetings keep this ideal before the public, by making it a rule that all those between the ages of twenty and thirty-two must take part in a long race, of about ten miles, before they can compete on the jump. For this combined race and jump the principal prize of the meeting is awarded; and the programme is completed by a another long race of about thirty miles, and jumping competitions for the youngest class below the age of twenty, and the veterans above thirty-two. In the jumping competition each competitor jumps twice;

and attention is paid by the judges to the style, as well as to the length, of the jump. If a man falls, his jump is of no account, and he is out of it unless all the others fall too. The length of the jumps executed depend, amongst first-class performers, mainly on the contour of the hill and the state of the snow. At Holmenkollen, where the greatest annual meeting is held, 45 metres is a very good jump indeed; but a young Norwegian of nineteen cleared 72 metres, about 237 feet, on another hill in the winter of 1926-27.

The long races are invariably up hill and down dale, with start and finish often at the same spot and always approximately at the same altitude. The track is laid beforehand by a committee of veteran ski-runners, who require all their skill and experience to perform their task satisfactorily. The course is kept a secret till the night before the race, and it never follows the beaten track. It is indicated by streamers of ribbon tied to the twigs of the trees which border it, and men are stationed at those corners where the runners in their haste may go wrong. From the wooded nature of the country there can be no question of a race abreast; and the runners start at intervals, determined largely by their number, and all follow the same track. In the military twenty-mile race, with pack and rifle, in February 1927, there were over three hundred runners, and they started at intervals of only fifteen seconds. Each man has a large number pinned to his chest, and his time is taken on arrival at the finish. I should mention that all the competitors in the long races are medically examined before and after the race, and that there are stations at intervals where light refreshments can be taken.

Such are the arrangements for ski-races in Norway, and it will readily be understood that their success would be impossible without the existence of the

highest spirit of sportsmanship. For the track is too narrow to pass, except quite exceptionally; and, if the best man is to win, it is essential that slower runners, who have started ahead of him, shall make way without hesitation. One can imagine the temptation to hang on, without stepping out of the track, in the hope of shaking off the man coming up behind; and it has always struck me as remarkable that complaints of obstruction in these races are unknown.

As regards times, all depends on the state of the snow. In favourable conditions the great fifty kilometre Holmenkollen race (about thirty-one miles) is run by the winner in about three-and-a-half hours; but, if the weather is warm and the going heavy, it may take over five. In the latter case much turns on the judgment shown in smearing the ski. There are preparations for every condition of the snow, and great attention is paid by Norwegian runners to the art of smearing. There are many difficulties to be considered, not the least of which is that the highest point of the track may be two thousand feet above the lowest, and the snow in the two places of quite different character. You may find that the stuff which took you along so well to start with, has suddenly made it impossible to go up a moderate incline except like a crab, and there is nothing to be done but off with your ski and scrape them, and smear on another preparation. In a recent military race, run in the worst conditions, nearly all the competitors were reported to have "Smört sig bort"—literally "smeared themselves away"—and to have had to stop and resmear at the end of the first mile.

The Norwegian newspapers of late discussed at some length the possibility of making Norway a rival of Switzerland for the ski-loving tourist. For a number of excellent reasons, most of them came to the

conclusion that it would not be practicable to attract the same sort of public which goes in such numbers to the latter country. But the comparatively few Englishmen, who do ski in Norway, rarely fail to return year after year ; and it is regrettable that their number is not far larger than it is. The season lasts from December to April, there are varieties of ground to suit every taste, and, most important of all, since the two-thousand-years-old Chinese proverb teaches us that the moral is to the physical as ten to one, in Norway is to be found the true ski-ing spirit, which sets long-jumping, and speed and endurance across country, as the ideal for the ski-runner. Nowhere, so well as in Norway, can our young and active skiers imbibe this spirit ; and nowhere else can they meet with so many admirable examples of how to live up to it.

Let me conclude, therefore, by conjuring my young countrymen to forego, for a while, the sensuous allurements of linked telemarks and slaloms, in favour of the sterner discipline of the jumping hill ; and let them exchange the furtive joys of the funicular and the languorous delights of silky surfaces for the austere embraces of Hardanger or of Jotunheim, and for the sinuous charms of the paths of Nordmarken. Anyone who follows this advice will, like a lover escaped from the toils, marvel why he did not change his mistress years ago.



CHAPTER VII

TIGER-HUNTING IN KOREA

“ Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
The arm'd rhinoceros, or the Hyrcan tiger.”

THOSE who are acquainted with Japanese art may have noticed that the tiger is a favourite subject of the older painters ; but it is doubtful whether it is generally realised that he is to be found to this day at Japan's very door. For the striped beast is associated in most men's minds exclusively with Indian jungles, in which he sleeps during the intolerable heat of the day and issues forth only when night has tempered the furnace. We know all about his habits in India ; and it has always been the ambition of the keen sportsman in that country to secure the handsome skin as a decoration for the walls of his house, to which he hopes at some future date to retire. Many books, some wearisome and others entertaining, have been written, describing the methods and the adventures by which this supreme object has been attained ; and the reader will return to such works with renewed zest after perusing this melancholy chronicle of failure.

The tiger is by no means confined to tropical jungles. He ranges over a large part of Central Asia, Manchuria, even China proper, and Korea. We read how, in the neighbourhood of Amoy, intrepid hunters rout him out of caves with spears and torches ; but in most of his haunts he spends his leisure amongst thickets and rocks, and must be sought by more orthodox means.

The climate of the regions mentioned has important effects on the tiger's habits and protective covering. The cold in winter is exceedingly severe, and in the shortest days he spends much of his time lying exposed to the warmth of the sun ; while the smooth, soft yellow pelt characteristic of the beast of Bengal is exchanged for one much whiter and rougher. The coat of the Manchurian tiger—a name applied to the Far Eastern animal wherever he may reside—is, in fact, the most beautiful of all animal skins, and it is perhaps the trophy most coveted by big-game shooters. Its only rival amongst the felines is the snow leopard, which differs in appearance from the leopard of the lower country much as does the Manchurian from the Indian tiger. It was the splendour of this prize and its proximity to Japan that moved us to plan a trip to Korea in December 1906.

An expedition of this kind must either be made alone or with a companion on whom one can rely, not only for stoutness of heart, but also for those everyday qualities which make intimate association a pleasure. A trip with an ill-chosen companion, who lacks equability under discomfort, a sense of humour when things go awry, and the determination to enjoy the outing at all costs, becomes a perfect purgatory ; and it is not long before the other party gets infected with the spirit of his fellow. Fortunately at Tokyo there was the very man for the business, in the person of an Austrian naval officer, who possessed all the delightful qualities connected in the popular mind with his profession. A daring navigator, a keen and experienced sportsman, an exceptionally well-informed man of the world, my friend enjoyed a philosophic and humorous outlook on life in general, which made him the best of company wherever you met him ; and, thanks to him, our excursion to Korea remains the

pleasantest of memories, in spite of the fact that no huge striped skin adorns the walls either of his Bohemian castle or my modest study.

Having decided on the expedition, the next thing was to get first-hand information as to the exact haunts of our quarry. At that time there lived in Japan an Englishman who had shot several tigers in Korea, and to him we turned for advice. And now arises a point of ethics much discussed amongst sportsmen. To what extent is one obliged by the rules of courtesy and the freemasonry of sport to help a rival? If he is a friend, there can only be one answer. But if he is a mere acquaintance, is one required to give away valuable knowledge won at the expense of much pecuniary outlay and severe personal effort? Is one not justified in withholding this knowledge from another whose activities may ruin your own future plans? And may it not even be permissible, without exactly telling a lie, to mislead the too curious inquirer into paths where he may possibly find what he is after, but where he certainly will not poach on your preserves? Those questions had not escaped us before we made our *démarche*. They had, in fact, been discussed exhaustively from every angle; but we had come to the conclusion that, as there could be no question of either of us going to Korea a second time, and as we knew our acquaintance did not intend to go himself that year, we might without impropriety ask his advice. The result showed that our informant belonged to what may be called the latitudinarian school in this matter—the school which holds that much is allowed to a man asked questions he does not wish to answer. We were not surprised; and it does our joint judgment credit that we appraised the information received at its exact real value. Nevertheless we set out.

The best time for tiger-shooting in Korea is the winter. At that season there is less covert, and there may be snow, which is invaluable for tracking. Moreover, the animals are then likely to leave the higher ground and concentrate to some extent in those places where food is plentiful. Finally, it is in winter that the fur is in prime condition, and this must be the first consideration. The latter half of January or the month of February are probably the best times of all, but we could not leave Tokyo then and had to make the trip before Christmas. This was certainly too early, and was the principal reason why we returned empty-handed.

If the time was dictated by circumstance, the place was more open to choice ; and long we pored over the map. The north was excluded because the journey would take too long ; and the central ranges of Korea were finally ruled out, after much hesitation, as being possibly too cold. In the south we knew for a fact that tigers had been killed by Occidentals ; for an American dentist, strolling through the country with the instruments of his craft and a Winchester on his arm, had a few years before killed a fine specimen basking in the sun not twenty yards from the road, and had wounded its mate. Surely we were as good tiger-hunters as any dentist, even an American one ; so we decided on the south.

Mokpo is a small port near the south-west point of the Korean peninsula, but we did not arrive there without some anxious moments. We were to meet our Korean interpreter at Fusan, the port where the daily steamers from Japan deposit travellers for Seoul, with which there is direct railway communication. In vain we looked round for our man on disembarking, and we sat down disconsolately in a tea-house to consider the next move. We had been there some

little time when a man neatly dressed in dark blue came up to our table, and said in good English, "I am Mr Pak." "The deuce you are," we cried with one voice, and clapped him on the shoulder. We were saved.

It appeared that Mr Pak had been scouting round us for some time, not quite sure of our identity; and it was only after having satisfied himself completely that we were the persons he sought that he accosted us. He proved an excellent fellow, quiet, resourceful, and good-tempered in circumstances which he cannot have enjoyed in the least. He had served with other Englishmen as interpreter and took us in hand with the respectful firmness of experience. Mokpo was to be our destination, and passages had been booked, but not yet paid for. So all we had to do was to thank Mr Pak for his foresight, pay for the tickets, and step on board.

There is not much to be said about Mokpo, though it may be a more interesting place now than it was twenty years ago. Having paid visits of politeness to the Japanese officials, who received us with the courtesy of their race, we asked Mr Pak to explain the demeanour of several elderly gentlemen squatting under the shadow of hats literally about five feet in diameter. We learned that they were mourning the loss of one of their parents, and that they were condemned to their head-gear and to complete abstention from work for the space of three years after the demise. We reflected that the Koreans understood the fitness of things in enforcing idleness by ordaining a hat which made any active occupation out of the question.

Apart from the hats of mourning, which vary in size in accordance with the relationship of the wearer to the departed, the Koreans are surely the most curiously dressed people in the world. Imagine a

whole population clad in white nightshirts, and, not content with that, wearing when out of mourning a coquettish little head-dress not unlike a miniature top hat perched on their pates. On nearer approach, the black hat is seen to be semi-transparent and to encage a knot of hair like a bird. The hat is, in point of fact, woven of very fine bamboo fibres, having the appearance of black horse-hair, but not so closely knit that you cannot see through it. The fact that it does not withstand rain is the finishing touch of unsuitability to this costume of an agricultural people.

We had to stay a couple of days in Mokpo, whilst Mr Pak made the necessary arrangements. We had tents with us in order to be independent of lodgings said to harbour more inmates than we cared for. So ponies had to be hired for these and for other impedimenta. The Korean pony has never, so far as I know, had justice done to his remarkable qualities. He has no resemblance to the Chinese pony you see in Peking and on the race-courses and polo-fields of Far Eastern ports. These latter are hard, queer-shaped, fiddle-headed animals of about fourteen hands. The Korean pony is not much more than ten hands high, yet shaped, not like a pony, but like a tiny horse. We were assured that he is never on any occasion allowed to lie down, and his temper, presumably in consequence, is such that every pony in a caravan, whether ridden or loaded, has a separate man to lead him. It was out of the question to mount our animals of a morning without first throwing a cloak over their heads, for the approach of anyone not clad in the regulation nightshirt threw them into a paroxysm of rage and terror. Once in the saddle, they seemed quiet enough, though it was well to keep your feet, which nearly touched the ground, out of reach of their teeth. Some enterprising horse lover ought to import

a picked cargo of Korean ponies into England. Most interesting and valuable crosses would result.

As we were bound for the wilds, we casually instructed our factotum to secure a sufficiency of Korean money for the whole trip, which would last about three weeks. We noticed that he did not seem to approve the suggestion, and, on being pressed, he observed that the arrangement would be unnecessarily costly, as it would entail hiring ten extra ponies. In reply to our astonished queries, Mr Pak explained, as one speaking to children, that Koreans in the interior only accepted "cash" in payment for goods or services, and that no pony could carry more than five pounds' worth of this medium of exchange. He had hired four "cash" ponies, and proposed to send them back to Mokpo for fresh supplies when we ran short.

Of course Mr Pak was right, but a word of explanation may interest the greenhorn. "Cash" are coins made of any base metal, of any shape, and of any size between that of a farthing and a five-shilling piece, with a large square hole punched in the middle, by means of which they are threaded by hundreds on rough strings of twisted rice-straw. Their value is a matter of opinion, but depends in no way on their individual size or quality. They are, in short, a kind of bulk coinage; thoroughly democratic in that the fat, well-rounded disc of pure copper counts for no more than the thin, misshapen piece of iron. As far as I remember, we obtained them at Mokpo at the rate of about one thousand to the pound; but, once away from the town, their purchasing power varied in surprising fashion. In those innocent days we considered the whole business very laughable, though we appreciated the advantage of having our wealth in a form which made it physically impossible for any individual thief to carry off more than about two

sovereigns. But looking back over the weltering sea of post-war exchanges, the Korean cash seems like some stout symmetrical lighthouse set upon a rock.

It is next to impossible in any country to conduct a serious shooting expedition without local assistance ; and Mr Pak had been busy from the first moment of arrival at Mokpo in getting into touch with the tiger-hunters. In Korea, at any rate in South Korea, these men form a caste apart, though there are, of course, no real caste differences amongst Buddhists. The occupation of tiger-hunting is hereditary, and those born to it are supposed to be of a fiercer disposition and more martial instincts than the everyday Korean, who is a very mild and peaceable individual. Mr Kang, whose services we secured, was a small, energetic fellow, who marked his superiority over the common herd by wearing a khaki-coloured shooting suit, cloth cap, and bandolier of cartridges round his waist, instead of the usual nightgown and top hat. He engaged his own satellites as beaters, and it was not without a chuckle of supreme satisfaction that we learned that he was the very man who had accompanied our English acquaintance in Japan on his successful expedition after tigers.

So at last we were off ; interpreter, tiger-hunters, pack ponies and all. And our last impression of Mokpo was the school, a small, square, isolated, one-room building half a mile outside the village. From this seat of learning issued a terrifying din, and, as we peered anxiously through the small windows in passing, we saw a white-robed teacher surrounded by about two score squatting children packed together on the floor. They were all shouting together at the top of their voices, and continued doing so as long as we were in hearing.

After a short march we pitched our tents in a dry

meadow, and went for a stroll before dinner. The weather was perfect, clear and crisp, with a hint of frost in the air. The country was not quite like any we had seen. It consisted of small hills covered with scrub of pine and camelia bushes; the hills isolated from each other by little valleys of meadow and cotton-fields, depending for their fertility not on irrigation but on the rainfall. We saw nothing of interest, and returned to an excellent meal prepared by the Japanese cook we had brought. Much has been written about the super-excellence of the Chinese cook, and far be it from me to disparage his culinary skill. But in justice I must record the opinion that the Japanese are much superior to the Chinese in this sphere. Their quick intelligence enables them to learn European dishes with surprising success, and their spotless cleanliness affords to the fastidious diner a sense of security and tranquillity which he does not always enjoy at the hands of a Chinese cook.

After dinner Kang expounded his plan of campaign through the medium of Mr Pak. There were probably tigers in the neighbourhood, and five had been trapped during the summer in a village near by. This information surprised us exceedingly, as it seemed queer to trap tigers in a village. Later in our wanderings we had ocular proof, not that tigers had been actually trapped, but that traps were set in villages. The trap is a stone enclosure with three walls, about five feet high, the fourth wall being also the wall of the house of the trapper. It reminded me much of a small pig-sty; and to make the resemblance more complete, a live pig is placed in it as a bait. Above the sty is rigged an enormous rock, which can be released from its perch by pulling a string. The convenient part of the business is that the sportsman, instead of spending an uncomfortable and insecure

night watching his trap, is at ease in his own drawing-room playing bridge, or even in bed by the side of his spouse. When he hears the squealing of the victim he pulls the string, and down comes the rock on tiger and pig alike. He then leaves the bridge-table or the bed and, if any life is left in the beast, finishes him off with a spear.

Needless to say that Kang, a man of action, did not propose that we should adopt these armchair methods. His plan was to beat out the low hills, one after another, with his men, while we placed ourselves in the most likely passes on the ridge. In fact, the procedure was exactly the same as that followed in beating a wood at home for roe-deer, hinds, or smaller game, when there are not more than two rifles or guns. We began with the hill up which my friend and I had strolled a short way the evening before, and here we had the greatest thrill of the whole trip. In crossing an open patch of sand which we had examined not eighteen hours earlier, we came upon the deep, fresh tracks of a large tiger. It was quite impossible that we could have missed them last time we were there, nor could they be anything but tiger tracks. No other animal could leave such enormous traces of his presence; deep and broad as soup plates, they stared us in the face.

Sportsmen are apt to retain the optimism of their boyhood long after they should have grown wiser; and, as we pored over the tracks, both of us indulged aloud in the rosiest prognostications for the future. We even went so far as to doubt whether we had brought sufficient alum with us to cure our trophies. In short, we recaptured for a time the spirit in which, twenty years earlier, another companion and I had debated the hiring of a cart to carry home our yet uncaught fish, as related in the first chapter of this book. Nor

did expectation of triumph leave us for a good many days, and I still count it as fortunate that, at the very outset of our chase, we should have met with such encouragement.

Having lost the track of the tiger on rocky ground, we proceeded to the ridge and chose two likely-looking passes about a hundred yards apart. Soon the opening yells of Kang's army warned us that the beat had begun. It was not unreasonable, after what we had just seen, to expect that a large tiger was at that moment between us and the beaters, and I confess that I looked at my surroundings with some misgiving. There was not a tree tall enough to lodge me out of reach of a good-sized dog, much less a tiger; nor were there any rocks behind which to hide. So I resigned myself to my fate and took an inward oath that nothing would induce me to fire till the game had passed, or at any rate was broad-side on and heading for the rear. I had with me a '303 magazine rifle and a double twelve-bore ball and shot gun by Rigby, both with expanding bullets. I held the small-bore and propped the loaded double-barrel against a bush within reach of my hand. My friend had nothing but a Mannlicher, with which he seemed as happy as if he had been ensconced in one of his own turrets in company with a twelve-inch gun. He was an excellent marksman.

The yells of the men waxed and waned in our ears as they topped the rises and sank into the hollows of the covert, swelling into a louder chorus when a thick patch of camelia bushes was approached. We remained at tiptoe point, but the beat was blank. So was the remainder of our hill, and we moved on to another. The result was the same, and the day ended full of hope but empty of attainment. We continued to beat the neighbourhood of our camp for several

days, and constantly saw old tiger tracks and excrement. But we never came across tracks so fresh as on the first day, and never caught a glimpse of a tiger or any other large game. It was time to move on.

At this stage we ought to have insisted on tying up a victim in the Indian manner. We had not seen a sign of any animal on which a tiger could make a meal, and it was clear that the beasts must, in this district at any rate, cover enormous distances in search of food. An ox or ass tethered on the hill-side might have set a term to these voyages and brought the wanderer to anchor. It is true that it was too cold at night to think of sitting up, even if it had been possible to construct a machan; but, if the bait had been taken, the tiger would probably have lain up close by and we should have had a good chance of getting a shot at him. But Kang was altogether against tying up, and declared that it was impossible to procure an animal for the purpose. Mr Pak did not like the idea either, and it must be conceded that there is much to be said for his point of view. Finally, my friend was rather half-hearted, and evidently thought the proceeding not quite sportsmanlike, though he afterwards admitted that we had made a mistake in not tying up. Now my experience is that it is seldom worth while on a shooting trip to insist on a course to which the local experts are resolutely opposed. You may be quite right, but things have a way of not working out according to plan in the face of native disapproval. So we stuck to our original plan of campaign throughout.

In the course of our subsequent marches we supplemented the larder with ducks and pheasants. Some parts of Korea were full of wild-fowl twenty years ago, and we saw flocks of geese and of cranes, besides many species of ducks. The pheasants were the

ordinary Chinese ring-necked pheasant which now dominates the breed at home. They seemed very large after the Japanese variety, to which we had become accustomed. But Versicolor, if smaller than the Chinese bird, is quicker on the wing; and the dark metallic green of the cock's neck and breast harmonises beautifully with the various shades of grey and blue of the rest of the plumage.

As we walked or rode along we had plenty of time to study the idiosyncrasies of our followers. They carried a hundred pounds or so without an effort or a murmur, but it did not do to hurry them. At mid-day a halt of several hours was required for the consumption of the principal meal of the day. This had to be fresh-boiled rice, a dish which takes a considerable time to cook. Rice is not a particularly nourishing cereal, and the quantity necessary to sustain the exertion of marching appears to be prodigious. At any rate, I could not have believed it possible for human beings to stow away such bulk at a sitting as did our coolies. The resulting lethargy was of surprisingly short duration—only an hour or so—after which the road was taken with renewed cheerfulness. Members of the Alpine Club tell us that it is not always an unmixed pleasure to follow on the heels of a guide in the freshness of the early morning. They should fall behind a number of Koreans at the beginning of the day and they would revise their standards of human emanations. No doubt the heavy rice diet is to blame for the more explosive accompaniment of the cortège, and the thickly wadded clothes supply the subtler but more lasting vapours.

Though the weather kept persistently fine it had grown steadily colder as Christmas approached, and we were fain to stuff rice-straw under our camp-beds in order to reduce the chill from the ground. The

tents were often frozen stiff with rime in the morning, so we were not sorry to come to the Monastery of Tadumsa and get a roof above our heads. The monks lived in the pleasant wooded fold of a mountain much higher and wilder than any we had yet met. They greeted us in the friendliest way, and placed at our disposal the principal temple of the place. They were surprised at our refusing the shelter of the living-room, warmed by the usual Chinese device of heating the hard mud floor and sleeping benches by means of hot air flues. But we preferred the temple which had never been tenanted save by the row of painted images seated on a bench running the whole length of one side. They were not too badly carved—some life-size and others mere infants ; and every time you caught them out of the corner of your eye they gave you a start of surprise.

In this room we set up our beds and spent about a week—eating our breakfast and dinner by the warmth of a brazier. Each morning before it was yet light, a priest and acolyte came in bearing a little lamp and gong. With sleepy eyes we watched the grave and handsome man as he intoned his morning prayer in purest Sanskrit. Of course we could not understand a word, nor, so we were assured, could he. But of all languages we had heard this was the most liquid and tuneful. The low note of the gong ended the prayer most fittingly, and the two worshippers left us to a last quiet snooze. The experience alone was worth all our hard work.

At Tadumsa we had been preceded by one of those travellers whose passage through a backward country ensures a hearty welcome for the next European who comes that way. I do not know whether Dr Smith was American or British, but from all we heard he was evidently a man of character and humanity.

There were, nevertheless, moments when we wished that he had left behind a lower medical reputation ; for it was embarrassing for a layman to be expected to perform a major operation on a moribund lady at a moment's notice. It was also inconvenient to find a score of patients outside your door just as you were starting for a day's shooting, and to be confronted after breakfast with a gigantic tumour, own brother to the one removed with such brilliant results by Dr Smith three years before. Such were some of our experiences for, so soon as it was known that two Europeans were at the Monastery, the halt and the maimed came trooping in.

We were not altogether unprepared for the emergency, and had brought with us a plentiful supply of soap, disinfectants, and bandages. My friend, moreover, had the handiness and versatile knowledge peculiar to his calling, and was the possessor of some pocket instruments of the simpler kind. The sight of these at first made matters worse by raising hopes which could not be fulfilled, but Mr Pak finally succeeded in convincing the few bad cases that, though we shared the goodwill, we altogether lacked the skill and knowledge of Dr Smith. Most of the patients were suffering from woodcutter's wounds, which needed only washing thoroughly and bandaging ; others had aches and pains for which we administered harmless doses. The dirt was universal, and we soon got rid of all the soap we could spare, though we only insisted on the neighbourhood of the wound being washed. Every day we were at Tadumsa we spent an hour or so at this work, my naval companion handling the knives and bandages and I the pills.

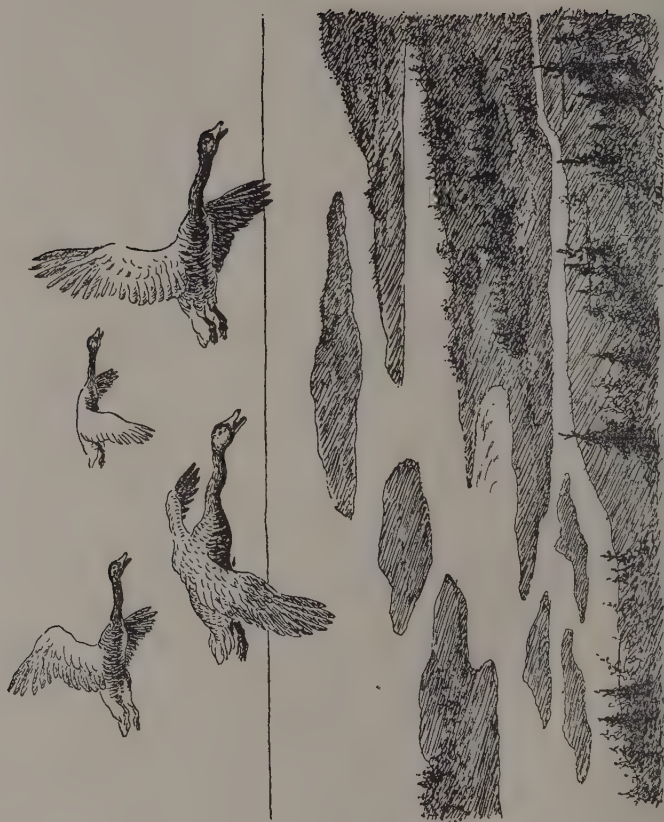
Our hopes, which had fallen low, rose again the first day we had from Tadumsa. The country was wilder and bigger than before ; and not only were there

plenty of old tiger tracks, but we found recent signs of pig, which we hoped would have attracted the great felines. But blank day followed blank day, and at last we decided that we could not return quite empty-handed, and would have a try for the pig. It was a terrible come-down ; but a good boar is a much prized trophy in most countries, and beggars must not be choosers. In this more humble sport we were at once successful ; for my companion grassed a monster boar the first day with a single shot from his Mannlicher, as he galloped by two hundred yards away. It took twelve stout men to bear him home, and he kept the whole party in good meat till we reached the coast four days later.

At Mokpo we disbanded Kang and his army, sent back the two Japanese servants direct to Tokyo, and, in company with Mr Pak, boarded a steamer bound for Chemulpo, which is the port for Seoul. The voyage up the coast was uneventful, but interesting on account of the terrific tides which run through the creeks and passages. The captain was a garrulous fellow and made our flesh creep with stories of " black-bird " catching in the South Seas and the part he had taken in this infamous traffic. I thought the man was a Welshman at first ; but my companion, who had a fine ear for subtleties of accent, pronounced him a Norwegian. In any case he became far less communicative when he learned, probably through Mr Pak, that one of his guests was a naval officer. At Seoul we spent two days amongst the curio shops and revelling in the flesh-pots provided by the British Consul-General, who overwhelmed us with kindness. A month after our departure we were back in Tokyo.

Thus ended my only tiger-hunting expedition—a complete failure as regards the main object and a resounding success in every other way. Without the

lure of that striped and woolly skin I doubt if I should have ever visited Korea, or been in a position to supply the Foreign Office with a luminous report regarding the agricultural, social, and political conditions and future of the Peninsula. With shame I must add that this report was not entirely the outcome of professional zeal. My father, who always encouraged and expected his sons to take a serious view of their professions, had paid for my expedition ; and I had, in common decency, to give him something solid for his money. The Foreign Office understood the case so well that I was allowed to communicate a copy of the report to him, and, with that common-sense and acumen which have made his judgments the admiration of the English-speaking Bench and Bar, he declared himself well satisfied with the result of his outlay. His appreciation of the document was not improbably heightened by the absence of the trophy ; for nothing my father would have liked less than a tiger skin in his house. His feelings on its arrival would have been much the same as those of another parent whom I knew, when a furniture-van disgorged into his well-appointed country mansion a stuffed crocodile eighteen feet long, "as a present from Bill" in the Sudan. So even the one failure of the excursion had its consolations.



CHAPTER VIII

BIRDS OF PASSAGE

" The ousel-cock so black of hue,
With orange-tawny bill,
The throstle with his note so true,
The wren with little quill ;

" The finch, the sparrow, and the lark,
The plain-song cuckoo gray,
Whose note full many a man doth mark
And dares not answer nay."

A DIPLOMAT is himself a bird of passage, and it is but proper that he should take an interest in his fellows. If he happens to, he will make many acquaintances denied to those who stay at home ; and he will be able to pass in their company some short time at least of almost every day. Especially is this the case if fate has placed him in a post where the Embassy or Legation has a garden ; or if the capital he adorns is so small that a few minutes' walk will take him into the country. For such capitals exist, though a Londoner might well doubt it. But the most interesting part of his experience will be to see his old friends in new surroundings ; to meet the English summer migrants in their winter haunts, and to observe the breeding habits of birds which only visit our shores in the cold weather.

The late Mr W. H. Hudson was the most original and suggestive modern writer on the habits of birds ; and I should dearly have liked to ask him what he made of the fact that the crested tit is only to be found

nesting in the United Kingdom within the confines of the Spey valley or thereabouts, whereas it is a common breeder in the orchards of Normandy. What can possibly explain such an anomaly in distribution? If in the orchards of Normandy, why not in those of Herefordshire, which resemble them in almost every way?—instead of in the conifer-clad woods of a highland strath which has nothing whatever in common with Normandy. I record this curiosity in distribution because it is not mentioned in the books of reference which I have seen, and it struck me as remarkable when I found many crested tits' nests in the Norman apple-trees more than thirty years ago.

It does not surprise us that kites and crows should haunt the streets of Eastern and North African cities, because we know that they did the same in London when conditions were favourable. And we can even accept it as a rub of the green when a kite picks up our golf ball on the fair-way of the Cairo links and drops it fifty yards away in the rough, as I have seen happen more than once. But what are we to think of the proceedings of the Norfolk plover, or stone curlew, when it chooses as its nesting place the flat mud roofs of buildings belonging to the Egyptian Department of Public Works? In our own country this bird is never seen far from the wild, open heath or downland, and it is quite unknown in the vicinity of dwellings. Yet in Cairo it flits about the streets at sundown, and, as I have said, builds its nest, or rather lays its two eggs, on the flat mud roofs. These roofs have, of course, little in common with, say, that of the Foreign Office. They are extensive, dusty expanses, resembling rather an elevated desert plateau than a roof; but it is none the less surprising to find a thick-knee nesting on them.

Londoners have become accustomed to the presence

of the gulls in St James' Park, and it is well known that the wildest birds soon ascertain that a particular locality is free from danger. Nowhere is this better illustrated than on the pond in the Zoological Gardens outside Cairo. It is quite a small pond—perhaps fifty yards across—and on Sunday afternoons the paths along the side used to be a favourite promenade of fashion. Even the great Lord Cromer was to be seen there. In spite of this, and the presence twenty yards away of an Egyptian military band in full blast, the pond was always crowded with genuine wild-fowl. When the band struck up its first brazen notes they would all rise into the air, but they quickly settled down again. There were many hundreds of fowl sometimes present: shovellers, teal, mallard, widgeon, pintails were the species I actually remember; but no doubt Captain Flower, who used to be the Director of Gardens, and took a great interest in his guests, could add to the list. The pintails, most aristocratic of all the ducks, seemed to be the least at home; they usually had their heads up, and were the first to take the alarm. In the weeping willows bordering the pond farthest from the path, was a large colony of night herons. The pond was, in fact, the most interesting place in the gardens.

Another place where wild-fowl are at ease in the company of man is on the great moat of the Imperial Palace in the middle of the city of Tokyo. Surely the walls of this moat must be the finest example of dry masonry in the world, and the cyclopean blocks of stone which form them are in perfect harmony with the vast scale of the whole conception. The broadest part of the moat, which is indeed quite a lake, is bounded on its outer side by a high bank, on the top of which runs a busy road carrying jingling electric trams. Yet large flocks of wild geese and several

species of ducks were constantly on the moat in winter. The geese would sometimes fly quite low over the Embassy garden, which was not far away, and would sorely tempt the members of the Chancery to abuse their extra-territorial rights by letting off fire-arms within the city boundaries.

Gardens are everywhere a favourite haunt of birds, and I have been lucky enough to serve in two capitals where our Legation was provided with a charming garden. And in this connection an expression of gratitude and acknowledgment is due to the authorities in London for the manner in which they have housed His Majesty's representatives abroad. Of course mistakes have been made and opportunities lost in the last hundred years ; but, taking it all in all, a rare degree of foresight and appreciation of the situation has been shown. It is so easy to gird at the Treasury or the Office of Works, but the fact remains that the commonest remark of one's foreign colleagues on this subject is : " Of course you have the best Embassy (or Legation, as the case may be) here ; the British always have." This is an exaggeration of envious minds ; but my experience is that the British representatives, on the whole, are infinitely better housed than those of any single other nation. Nor is there anything extravagant or showy about the buildings or furniture. They are dignified and adequate, as befits our traditions.

In Tehran the Legation garden kept its Persian character, though a concession was made to English taste by an ample show of flowers. Those who have not read Professor Browne's wonderful " Year Amongst the Persians " must be told that a Persian garden is a very old example of the truth of relativity. In England, with her shady lanes and fragrant meadows, a garden on the Persian model would have little

attraction ; for it is but a piece of ground enclosed by high mud walls, through which a runnel of water provides the life-blood for a wealth of trees and bushes. This is the ordinary garden, which the wealthier citizen elaborates by means of a more plentiful stream, led, not over a bare bed of thirsty earth, but along little channels lined with tiles of blue and filling in its course one or more blue-tiled tanks. These tanks deserve a word, for their construction gives them a peculiar charm. They are rectangular and oblong, with a shallow tiled trough round them to take the overflow. The sides of the tank are not flush with the ground, for a skirting of tiles continues them about six inches above it. And so cunning is the levelling that the water escapes into the trough evenly over the whole edge. In short, seen from a little distance, the tank looks like a great bowl brimful and overflowing. The effect is queerly generous and refreshing.

But whether the garden is simple or elaborate it is difficult to exaggerate the ecstasy of deep shadows and clear tinkling streams after the blazing aridity of the outside world. How well-deep the shadows can be on the Iranian uplands I did not myself realise till, lying one day on my back under a great walnut tree to break a long march, I saw through the thick branches a star shining brightly in the cloudless sky at noon. The tree was not the *arbre sec* in the kingdom of Prester John, and the story is no travellers' tale, but true.

These gardens are usually at some distance from the town, so that the owner and his friends, who take tea in them during the summer months, taste to the full the contrast between the hot and dusty expedition and the cool shade. In winter they are rarely visited, and we used during that season, often in the afternoon, to ride round to several of them, and for a few krans get

the gardener and his boys to beat them out to us for woodcock. In the Legation garden no shot was ever fired, and it was one of our pleasures to watch a particular woodcock poking about among the dead leaves close to the Chancery. When spring came round the little scops owl made the garden ring at night with his clear, musical note; and the blue jays, which nested in holes under the roof, woke one with their chattering in the early morning. The hoopoe nested, too, in the garden, and made the heat of the day more languorous with the soft cooing cry to which he owes his name. Few birds are so elegant as he with his handsome crest, given him, so the Persians say, by Solomon for his services as messenger of love to the Queen of Sheba.

These were our favourite garden birds, but there were others of which the list is lost with the precious notebook mentioned in the first chapter. The nightingale was certainly one, but his Eastern voice, so extolled by the Persian poets, is inferior to that of our Western bird. The bee-eater was another, but only a visitor from the outer world, where he hawked for insects and sat on the telegraph wires like some gorgeous swallow.

But the bird which struck me as the most unusual looking which I saw in Persia, was the wall-creeper. I only met him once there in a rocky ravine in Mazanderan, where he was flitting and hovering against the bare rock. The peculiar disposal of his crimson, white, and grey-blue plumage, and the motions of his flight made him appear curiously like a beautiful great butterfly. I have only seen him on one other occasion, many years later, in a gorge of the Mürz, not far from Mürzteg in Styria; and here he produced exactly the same butterfly impression. Of all the small birds I have met with, I am inclined to

give first prize for charm and distinction to the wall-creeper.

The Legation garden at Oslo offers a sharp contrast to that at Tehran. Instead of a flat enclosure within dry mud walls, fertilised by a stream skilfully led from the distant mountains, we have a charming slope bounded on three sides by a fall of bare rock, and needing artificial watering only in the dog days. And instead of the beautiful Eastern plane we have the maple as our staple hardwood tree, and the birch, pine, spruce, larch, ash, rowan, horse chestnut, bird-cherry, lime, elm, oak, laburnum, fruit trees, and many flowering shrubs, of which the lilac flourishes better than anywhere else I know. The birch grows to great size and beauty in this northern climate and shallow soil. It is the lady of quality amongst trees, the most gracefully distinguished of all, and the most delicate in appearance; yet better able than any other to bear the rudest weather, and burning with a fiercer flame when kindled.

The garden covers about five acres, a good deal less than that at Tehran, and of this the buildings take up some space. But enough remains to shelter many sorts of birds, and there are impenetrable thickets and rocky walls for them to nest in. The Norwegians are notably kind to all animals; and there is none of that harrying of songsters in which southerners delight. The result is that the birds in Norway are tamer than elsewhere; and it is surprising how many make themselves at home within the precincts of the town. Lists are tiresome things, but I cannot refrain from giving one of the birds which nest in the Legation garden at Oslo.

Grey Crow.
Fieldfare.

Redwing.
Blackbird.

Great Tit.	White Wagtail.
Blue Tit.	Chaffinch.
Pied Fly-catcher.	Greenfinch.
Spotted Fly-catcher.	Linnet.
Redstart.	Swallow.
Robin.	House-martin.
Blackcap.	House-sparrow.
Wryneck.	Starling.

Twenty different species nesting in a town garden is a respectable total; and the following visitors have also been seen, and one or two of them may have nested as well:

Magpie.	Swift.
Sparrow-hawk.	Bullfinch.
Merlin.	Siskin.
Coal Tit.	Brambling.
Marsh Tit.	Hawfinch.
Nuthatch.	Yellow-hammer.
Tree Creeper.	Redpoll.
Great Spotted	Willow Wren.
Woodpecker.	Woodcock.
Waxwing.	Red-backed Shrike.

The starling is usually the first migrant to appear in Norway, but in 1927 I saw a redwing in the garden on 14th March in the middle of an unusually mild spell of weather, and the starlings did not appear till 27th March. In every country there seems to be one kind of bird which particularly marks the coming of spring. In England I always think of the lapwing, whose cries and tumblings used to rejoice us on the downs at Winchester soon after the turn of the year. In Oslo there is no doubt that the redwing is the bird. All day, and nearly all through the light night, he keeps up a monotonous chant of three or four loud notes on a rising scale, repeated at intervals of a few

seconds. You hear him wherever you go, inside or outside of the town, where there are trees. He does not show very much, and he has a very low, short, twittering song following the characteristic notes ; but he seems rather ashamed of this part of his vocal effort, and drops it soon after his arrival. The red-wing visits our shores in vast numbers in the winter, and it is impossible to understand why he never stays to breed. None of the thrushes feel so quickly the pinch of hard weather, and he is the first to perish in a prolonged frost. Yet some mysterious force drives him north as soon as spring comes round, while his cousins, the blackbird, song and missel thrush, stay behind. Again we must lament that Mr Hudson is no longer amongst us.

Far the most entertaining birds in the garden are the fieldfares. They are gregarious breeders, and six or seven pairs nest with us. They are never still for a moment and keep up a constant chattering, chasing any intruding cats, crows, and magpies. Nor are they more respectful towards mankind, and have an offensive manner, peculiarly their own, of showing their distaste. When anyone approaches a nest, the birds swoop down close to the head of the unsuspecting stroller and bespatter him with their droppings. Of ammunition they seem to have an inexhaustible supply, and their unerring aim would be the despair of the most accomplished airman. To such an extent is the nuisance prevalent that the ladies of the Legation carry parasols when near the trees where the birds build, and visitors are warned to avoid the barrage. In the morning, before people are about, the fieldfare does his love-making, and makes himself even more ridiculous than do most male creatures when courting. While the hen bird pecks about the lawn with the perfectly assumed unconsciousness of her sex, the cock

hops round her in a circle two or three yards away, his wings drooping, his tail depressed and spread, and his back humped, so that he not infrequently loses his balance and pitches forward on to his beak. The heavy laboured hops and the grotesque posture of the lover, coupled with the apparently complete indifference of his mistress, are inexpressibly comic.

In the winter the garden is almost deserted. Frost is in the ground two feet deep, and it is a wonder that the tits, yellow-hammers, and bullfinches, which still remain, can find a living. The Norwegian bullfinch (*pyrrhula major*) is a handsomer bird than ours. He is bigger, and the brighter colouring of the cock gains its full value when they sit together amongst the snowy branches, puffed out to twice their natural size against the cold. Though flocks of bullfinches and tits are usually in the garden during the winter, it is the squirrels which most give it life. A pair have their quarters somewhere in the roof of the old stables, and show themselves on mild days. These squirrels, red in summer and grey in winter, are something of a problem. They are our joy in the winter, but they eat most of the food put out for the birds, and there is no doubt they rob the nests. One was seen in the act of stealing the eggs of a chaffinch. One winter we filled some walnut shells with fat and hung them from a branch with cotton threads. They were meant for the tits, but the squirrels gnawed through the threads so that the shells fell down, and were at once carried off and hidden. This cunning of the Norwegian squirrel will surprise no one acquainted with Bishop Pontoppidan's famous "Natural History of Norway," written in 1751. For the observant divine informs us of these squirrels that "On a chip, or piece of wood, they'll sail across a small water on this expedition, and make use of their tail for a sail; and

with one foot they'll paddle and steer themselves with the other ; and thus they escape sometimes those that wait ashore for their landing, and find themselves mistaken, by thinking they must come with the wind." Poor squirrels ! They need all four feet to paddle with nowadays ; for the Americans are paying three shillings apiece for their skins, and hundreds of thousands have been flayed during the last year.

The work of the Bishop of Bergen is best known for the chapter on snakes in Iceland, which may be quoted in full without wearying the reader :—

“Chapter LXXII

“Concerning Snakes

“No snakes of any kind are to be met with throughout the whole island.” But, as a matter of fact, the part of the book dealing with Iceland was written by Mr N. Horrebow. Internal evidence would go to prove this fact, even if it was in doubt ; for the worthy prelate was not the man to confine himself to negatives. Thus we have him on the eagle : “An incident of this kind happened not far from Bergen ; where an eagle stood on the bank of a river, and saw a large salmon as it were just under him ; he struck instantly one of his talons into the root of an elm just by, and partly hanging over the river, the other he struck into the salmon, which was very large, and in his proper element, which doubled his strength, so that he swam away, and split the eagle to his neck, making literally a spread eagle of him ; a creature otherwise known only in heraldry.”

After this we turn with some confidence to the paragraph about the swallow, and are not disappointed : “For almost everybody knows that towards the winter, after they have chirped about a little, or, as we say, sung their swallow-song, they fly in flocks

together and plunge themselves down in freshwater lakes, and commonly amongst reeds and bushes; whence, in the spring, they come forth again, and take possession of their former dwellings. Our fishermen in the winter sometimes, by accident, fall upon whole flocks of swallows in this state, and bring them up by scores, and even hundreds together; they find them coupled two and two together, with their legs entangled, and bills stuck in one another; and they appear altogether like a strange mass. If they are brought into a warm room they will begin to move in half an hour, and in a little while will flutter and fly about; yet this untimely and unnatural reviving does not last longer than an hour at most, and then they die entirely. In Olaus Magnus' time this experiment was well known in the country." But before we laugh too heartily at the credulous Dane, we should remember that Gilbert White obviously shared his opinion regarding the hibernation of swallows nearly fifty years later.

The Norwegians declare that wrynecks are great robbers of small birds' nests, especially of such as build in holes in trees; and my friends have urged me to rid the garden of them. But the cuckoo's mate is a favourite, with his rich brown colouring streaked so curiously with black, his snake-like movements of the neck, and his loud, challenging cry; and I shall require the evidence of my eyes before he is molested. Another prevalent belief, or possibly a superstition, is that mackerel are unfit for human food, since they batten on the bodies of drowned mariners. On the west coast the Norwegians will not touch this fish, and the old Norsemen carried their prejudice to the western isles of Scotland, where the inhabitants still share it.

There are two handsome birds described in all books on British birds, but rarely seen at home. One is the

great black woodpecker, which is not uncommon in the forests round Oslo. He reminds one in size and dusky colouring of a jackdaw, but he has the red crest and undulating flight of his kind. His cry, as befits his bulk, is louder and harsher than that of his green cousin, and it is something of an experience for the bird-lover to encounter him in the great silent woodlands.

The other bird is the pine grosbeak. He is confined, except as a straggler, to the extreme north; and I have only seen him near Murmansk in North Russia. I arrived at that dreary place on 20th June 1918, and found no sign of spring. Patches of snow lay about, the grass was brown and the birch trees black as in mid-winter. A few days later a south wind set in, and the scene changed as it only can in the far north. The sun shone hot all day and all night, and within a week the birches were fully out, the new herbage was a foot high, and the air was humming with mosquitoes and midges. Migrants appeared as if by magic; and during one of my strolls in the neighbourhood I met for the first time pine grosbeaks. They were amongst the stunted pines which sparsely clothed the hills, and such is the harshness of the climate and the poverty of the soil that these trees had only a circumference of eighteen inches when well over a hundred years old. The wood was harder than any oak. In such surroundings one does not expect a bird of tropical brilliance, and the cock grosbeak, which has the size of a thrush, is like a parrot in his rose-red spring plumage. The hen is more soberly clad in yellow. Another interesting bird in the marshy spots round Murmansk was the blue-headed wagtail.

There was in 1918 quite a good little Natural History Museum in Archangel, due to the public spirit of a former governor of the province. The late Mr Henry

Seebohm has dealt with the birds of this district in his fascinating book on the "Birds of Siberia," and it is hopeless to try to rival him. It was my misfortune to spend a whole winter there, and to have to make the journey from Archangel to Murmansk by sea in the month of February. I shall not readily forget the drive down to Moses Island to board the waiting ice-breaker. There was a howling wind with sixty-three degrees of frost Fahrenheit when we started in the sledge; on board it was warm enough, and we managed about two knots an hour through the one and a half feet of ice in the river mouth. The ship ground and shook like a train running over points, and the water in her wake steamed like a boiling kettle. Once in the White Sea, conditions changed. It got less cold for one thing, and the ice, instead of being flat and uniform, was piled in hummocks sometimes eight feet high.

This ice-breaking business requires experience. It is useless to try to progress when the ice is under pressure from the effects of tide or wind. You must then lie still and husband your fuel, or you will quickly consume it to no purpose and have to be rescued by some more provident ship. On this trip we often lay quiet for hours at a time. Then, for no apparent reason, the pressure would relax; lanes of open water would appear, often with seals in them, and we would forge ahead again. The ice has one great advantage for a poor sailor—there is no fear of sea-sickness; and the most comfortless part of our journey was when we emerged into the open ocean with a gale blowing from the west and a list to port on account of the heavy ice on our rigging and upper works. The outward trip was made in an ice-breaker so constructed that it mounts on to the ice and breaks through it with its own weight. On the return journey we were on

board a Canadian ship with a sharp, reinforced steel cut-water, which shears through the ice like cheese. Both ships had merits, but neither could progress when the ice was under pressure.

If you follow the coast we have just left sufficiently far towards the eastwards, you will come to the port of Shanhaikwan, where the Great Wall of China plunges into the Yellow Sea. This wall is one of the wonders of the world; not so much owing to the visible majesty of its construction as to its unique appeal to the imagination. We had first seen it north of Peking, near the tombs of the Mings, rising over the crests of the hills, swooping into the valleys and up again the other side, till it disappeared into the mists of the April morning. And through a gateway in the wall trooped a cavalcade of Mongolian magnates returning to their deserts after a winter at the Imperial Court of Peking; swarthy men dressed in gorgeous silks and furs, their chattels and womankind packed in the two-wheeled hooded carts which accompanied Jenghiz Khan to the west, the sacred picture of their tribe exposed to view on the back of a special camel. And here, at Shanhaikwan, hundreds of miles away, was the Great Wall again—near, this time, to the tombs of the Manchu Emperors, who had supplanted the Mings—stopped in its course only by the ocean; the most impressive symbol in the world of the mightiness and final futility of the efforts of man.

But the amenities of the White Sea in winter-time and the grandeur of the Great Wall of China are as alien to the proper subject-matter of this chapter as are the gorgeous green tiles of the tombs of the Manchus or the great collection of old Chinese porcelain which used to lie in dusty heaps on the floor of a shed in their vicinity. It is to a stretch of marsh a few miles from Mukden that I would invite your attention.

Here on 21st April 1908 I had an interesting day's shooting in company with the Consul-General. There was some doubt amongst the "quidnuncs" of Mukden whether any snipe were in ; and the first day we went out with a very inadequate supply of cartridges. But on the 21st we were properly equipped.

The first thing that puzzled me was the character of the going. The marsh had all the appearance of being bottomless, at least in places ; but, though we sank immediately nearly to the knees, we then struck ground as unyielding as a pavement. The fact was that the frost was still in the ground below, two feet or so, and one could walk fearlessly everywhere. Our bag was nothing wonderful, though I believe it was a record for Mukden. It consisted of eighty snipe, of which a few were painted snipe, two common teal, and five spectacled teal. These last were the result of two barrels into a flock which flew past at extraordinary speed, and with a precision of manœuvre I never saw equalled by any fowl. But the principal interest lay in the novel surroundings, the crowds of geese and other birds on the wing, the little bittern I nearly caught with my hand, the skulking rails, and last, not least, the lunch amongst the tombs of the Manchus under a cloudless sky.



CHAPTER IX

SHOOTING IN SPRING

“ When proud-pied April, dress'd in all his trim,
Hath put a spirit of youth in everything.”

BRITISH sportsmen regard shooting during the spring of the year as an unworthy pursuit ; and our laws have made it, in the case of nearly all birds, an illegal one as well. Both opinion and legislature are right ; but it does not follow that they are equally right if universally applied. Our islands are singularly favoured by nature in the matter of climate, and nearly all the birds worthy of pursuit, which are to be found in them during the spring, have spent the winter exposed to the wiles of British shooters, and have well earned a temporary safety during, and immediately before, the breeding season. Continental countries are less happily situated. The inhabitants see a number of species, most desirable from the shooter's point of view, only during the spring and autumn migration ; and it is asking too much of human nature to expect them to forego the chase of these species in order that better sport may be enjoyed by others some months later.

These arguments cannot be applied quite literally to the woodcock and the cock capercaillie, the pursuit of which in spring is considered by many continental sportsmen as the most enjoyable outing of the year. The woodcock breeds somewhat sparingly in Germany and the old Austria-Hungary, and in great numbers in

Norway and Sweden. But in none of these countries does he winter to any extent ; and so vast are the forests at his disposal that it is impossible to bag more than a bird here and there unless advantage is taken of his peculiar habits during the pairing season.

I remember discussing the morality of spring woodcock shooting many years ago with the late Professor Collett ; and a better exponent of the subject would be hard to find. For the famous Norwegian ornithologist possessed not only an inexhaustible store of what may be called armchair knowledge, but an unsurpassed fund of experience as a field naturalist ; and the perfect simplicity and transparent honesty of his character gave a rare distinction to his conversation. The professor defended the practice against my insular prejudices by declaring that it was only the cock birds which fell victims to the spring shooter. It was not possible to distinguish with certainty between the sexes except by dissection, and he had dissected many shot during the spring and never found a hen. The cock alone indulged in those flights and calls which exposed him to the sportsman ; the hen remained on the ground during the performance. No doubt this is all true, but, as the woodcock is usually believed to be monogamous, his demise at the critical period of the year might be expected to affect seriously the prospects of his family. No doubt the real justification of the sport lies in the charm it exercises over its devotees and the difficulty of securing woodcock at any other time of year.

In any case woodcock shooting during the flight, as it is called, is eagerly awaited in Central Europe and Scandinavia. The birds, as soon as they arrive in the spring, and even when they are only making a temporary halt in the locality, indulge in fancy flights in the dusk of the evening. They seem to fly round

in large circles, usually passing over the same spots at intervals of a quarter of an hour or so. And as they fly, they utter high, twittering notes, which a keen ear on a still evening may hear a couple of hundred yards away. These notes are varied by a kind of low, snoring noise not unlike that made by ptarmigan when at rest. All deer-stalkers are familiar with these low snores emanating from the swirling mist of the high ground when waiting for the air to clear for a spy.

The sportsman, having ascertained the habitual flight of the birds, places himself at some point of vantage in the woods—usually in a clearing which gives a good field of fire. As the light slowly fails, he listens to the notes of the newly arrived migrants, marks the signs of early spring on the rose-tipped larch twigs, and thanks heaven that the long winter of discontent is gone. At last a sharp chirruping sound electrifies him; it draws nearer, and a woodcock flits above the tops of the nearest trees. Perhaps it is gone before he can shoulder his gun, perhaps he misses the mark, perhaps he brings it down. He resumes his vigil and soon hears a warning snore, and the scene is re-enacted. Then the light fails altogether, or the flight ceases; and he goes home with two or three birds—or possibly none—in his bag.

Such is the sport of shooting woodcock in the spring, and nowhere has it greater charm than in Norway. Here the endless winter makes one long passionately for spring; and the coming of the woodcock is the sportsman's certain sign that the yearly miracle is at hand. Snow still lies feet deep in the shadiest patches of the woods; but the southern slopes and clearings are bare and the sound of many waters fills the air, which for six long months has been deathly still. The beautiful blue hepatica stars the shrinking edges of

the snow, and the monotonous notes of the redwing and the joyous carol of the song thrush seem to reiterate the assurance that summer is at the door. Rational beings ought to be able to enjoy all this to the full without thought of slaughter, but many of us are so constituted that the satisfaction of the instinct for the chase is required to fill the cup.

The cock capercaillie is not a bird of passage at all, but he is a polygamous rascal whose amorous career may be cut short in the breeding season without detriment to the stock. Moreover, at this period it is possible to pursue him by methods infinitely more interesting, and demanding much greater knowledge of woodcraft than at any other. In fact, amongst continental sportsmen, caper shooting in the spring is ranked with deer and chamois-stalking as the highest form of sport. And here it may not be thought too discursive to say a word about the ideals of shooting prevailing abroad and at home. In Great Britain there is no denying the fact that marksmanship has now definitely gained the upper hand as the ideal. The object of nearly every owner of shooting is to present his guests and himself with the greatest possible number of the most exacting kind of shot. Grouse are, wherever practicable, driven to the guns ; partridges almost invariably so ; and pheasants are made to fly as high and in as great numbers as is compatible with the configuration of the ground and the purse of the host. Without in any way wishing to disparage the great difficulty of managing successfully a modern British shoot, it is no exaggeration to say that, for the great majority of shooters, the pursuit of the game is of little moment ; the shooting itself is everything. On the Continent things have remained much more as they were at home a century ago. Here the pursuit of the game is still the principal pleasure. Of course there are big

shoots abroad managed, though usually not so well, on British lines ; but in the main it is still true that the handling of dogs and the study of the habits of game are considered of greater importance than the difficulty of the shots presented or the weight of the bag. And it is in the light of this ideal that the circumventing of the cock caper in the breeding season must be judged.

The caper is a very shy bird as a rule, and difficult to find in the immense woods he haunts ; but a close study of his habits has brought to light his Achilles heel. In the spring, that is to say from about the middle of April to the middle of May, according to altitude and latitude, the birds seem to some extent to gather together. They have no regular playing place like blackcocks, which collect in considerable numbers on some favourite knoll where they spar and display their beauty to an admiring crowd of hens. The caper is less gregarious, but it is a fact that there are favourite places in the woods where in spring capers are to be found in greater numbers than elsewhere. These places become well known, and, in Austria, where woodcraft is perhaps better understood than anywhere else, they are closely watched as spring comes round, until one or more cock birds (the hens are only of account as attractions to their lord) are marked down as regularly roosting in some particular locality. Finally, the watchers hear the notes peculiar to the season, and the sportsmen are warned that the time to which they have been looking forward for the best part of a year is at hand.

I will take the reader to a comfortable shooting lodge in the heart of Styria. We are over two thousand feet up, and, though it is past the middle of May, spring is still in its first freshness. A trout stream tinkles by the door, and the great beech woods cover

the steeply rising mountains on all sides. The birds have already been "playing" for some time; but, intermittently, as the weather has been cold and broken. At midnight I am off with the keeper of my beat, and we drive for an hour in silence. The road ends, and we get out and light the lantern. In England we have almost forgotten the use of a lantern, but no one who has walked through a wood in darkness is likely to go without one if he can avoid it. Instead of groping your way at a snail's pace and stumbling and barking your shins, you can move resolutely and steadily forward. Thus we proceed for two whole hours, mostly mounting by a narrow path. At last my companion halts, puts out his light, and we stand listening.

The morning is, fortunately, absolutely still, and not the slightest sound breaks the silence of the forest. Nor can I detect the least sign of the coming dawn, and the darkness seems to make the silence deeper still. Thus we stand for perhaps a quarter of an hour, but I think it was nearly half. Looking upwards I notice I can make out the outlines of some branches earlier invisible, and suddenly Wentzel raises a warning hand. At first I hear nothing, but a moment later a faint sound, like a man tapping a wooden table three times with his forefinger, reaches my ears. The sound is clear and distinct, though faint, and evidently comes from some distance. With the utmost precautions against noise we move some twenty yards forward and halt again. This time the tapping is notably clearer, and is followed by a gurgling sound ending in a number of low clucks on a descending scale. I can just make out the excitement in Wentzel's features. The moment for action has come.

The caper was in a tree some hundred and fifty yards off, and it was necessary to cover practically the whole

of this distance before it would be possible to see him clearly enough to shoot. No time was to be lost, as the light was now quickly growing, and, if we were lucky with our first stalk, we might hope for a second, or even a third, before full day was upon us. But the bird is extraordinarily wary and quick of ear, except during the few seconds when he clucks at the end of his song. During this part of the performance he is deaf to all about him, and may not even take alarm at the firing of a gun. Whether this oblivion to his surroundings is due to the ecstasy of the love which swells him and sets his feathers quivering, or whether, as some aver, the posture of his head and neck during the critical moments actually closes the orifice of the ear, I leave to the pundits to decide. The fact remains that, whereas the snapping of the smallest twig will frighten him into listening silence or even into flight so long as he is quiescent or uttering the first part of his ditty, he is impervious to impressions from without during a few short seconds at uncertain intervals.

Thus we listened till the clucking sound began, and immediately took three long strides and stood motionless as statues. Generations of experience have shown that three strides are all that can be taken in safety at a time. Any further movement is fraught with danger, and it will readily be understood that it is important to end the third step well-balanced and in an unstrained attitude. For you cannot be sure when the tantalising bird will resume his call and enable you to move again. If he is alarmed ever so slightly, he will remain silent perhaps for a quarter of an hour; and, if you are in a cramped position or unsteady, you suffer silent agonies or frighten him for good by a convulsive movement. On that May morning our caper was in the best of form. No sooner was his call ended than he began again; and we moved forward

in unison, almost briskly, three steps at a time. Soon we stood close beside the tree from whose branches the ditty had called us.

This is often an agonising moment. You wait motionless with head bent until the clucking begins. Then you throw all precautions to the winds and glare wildly at the dim branches above. Perhaps your companion spots the outline of the bird before you do, and with furious gesticulations and hoarse whispers tries to cram his knowledge into you before you are both frozen again into comfortless rigidity. Not infrequently you finally persuade yourself that an opaque growth of pine or beech is the bird, and the discharge of your gun is followed by the heavy flight of the uninjured caper. On the occasion we are describing, nothing of this sort happened. The cock was plainly visible against the brightening sky. As he began his last fatal cluck I raised the gun, and a charge of big shot brought him with a resounding thud to the ground.

I hear the critic cry : " You call this sport, potting a wretched bird sitting at close range with a shot gun ! If you had used a rifle, there might be something in it." To such a one I would reply that a few people do use a rifle ; but that the majority, myself included, prefer a gun for reasons which may or may not be sufficient. In the first place, the shot from a rifle, unless you wait till the light is pretty good, is likely to be a miss. Now the stalk and the whole affair is arduous, and the disappointment of a miss at the end of it is considerable to the sportsman, but simply heartbreaking to his attendant who has borne the heat and burden of the chase. Moreover, the shot, even with a gun, is by no means a certainty, as I have proved to my cost. The baffling half-light makes a miss possible unless the bird stands out well against

the sky, even when your aim is directed against the quarry and not at some colourable vegetable imitation. Finally, the essence of the sport is the stalk, and especially the last part of it. If you rely on a gun you must try to get within twenty-five yards. With a rifle, a shot may as well be taken at fifty yards as twenty-five if the light is good enough. In short, the case against the rifle for caper is the same as that against the modern small-bore for deer-stalking in Scotland; and few will deny that the advent of this highly efficient weapon has robbed the sport of much of its attraction, by enabling the stalker to dispense with the last arduous hundred yards' crawl imposed upon him by the high trajectory of the old four-fifty. Again I hear the critic: "You first say the rifle is too uncertain, and in the next sentence that it is too effective. You really can't have it both ways. Please choose which leg you want to stand on." To which I would reply that I stand on both legs; and that the rifle is, in fact, too uncertain in some circumstances, and too effective in others. And I will leave it at that.

We must return to our Styrian forest. We gloat for a time over our victim, and agree that he is an unusually heavy and handsome specimen of his kind. This is the invariable verdict when a cock is first shot, and it is only after he is brought home that he reveals himself as a very ordinary caper. As a matter of fact, these birds vary much in size and beauty of plumage—a bird of the previous year still retaining a slightly immature appearance and only weighing eight or nine pounds, whereas a veteran may tip the scale at fifteen. Such a bird has an extraordinarily old-world look, the grey, powdery tips to his feathers giving an impression of hoary age. He is a fitting companion to the antediluvian elk, which in Norway and Sweden shares his forests. Having gathered our cock, we

exchange the traditional salutations in German, and Wentzel sticks a sprig of spruce into my hat as a crown of victory. The light is growing, and in vain we listen for other love-sick cocks, whose notes would, in any case, be difficult to disentangle from the swelling chorus of song-birds. Once the sun is fairly up there is no more to be done, and we turn home. It is a perfect morning, with mist in all the hollows and the ridges bathed in sunlight. No carriage awaits us, and I, for my part, feel I have earned my breakfast when I reach the lodge about nine.

Such is the story of a successful morning after caper in spring, and it is not likely to appeal to the protagonist of skilled marksmanship and big bags. And it may well happen that the sportsman returns without even one bird to show. The weather may be wet and blustering, and the birds silent in consequence; or, if they are calling, it may be impossible to hear them for the noise of the wind in the trees. One may blunder too near their haunts in the dark before they begin to play, and have the mortification of hearing one or more take wing and of knowing that your chance is gone before the sport has begun. Or the actual stalk may go awry through the breaking of a twig at the wrong moment, and your cock takes flight or ceases playing and keeps you in suspense until it is broad daylight. I have experienced all these disappointments. On the other hand, you may bag two or three cocks if you are lucky. After your first, you may soon hear a second; and, having secured him, a third may be successfully stalked. I have never myself got more than two in the morning; but many people have got more, and I was assured that the late Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria once bagged no less than seven—and you may be sure that it was by fair stalking, for the old gentleman was a pattern to all in

the field of sport. His Majesty must have lost little time ; and no doubt all the birds had been carefully marked down—or rather up—beforehand. Their habit is to spend the night in the tree in which they go up to roost, and to play in this tree next morning ; so, if a keeper actually locates the right tree overnight, you know where to find your cock even in the dark. Perhaps the Imperial shooter bagged one on the ground to make up his total ; for, when the light is growing strong, the cock usually leaves his perch and settles on the ground close to his roosting tree. Here he sometimes plays for a short time ; and it is occasionally possible to save a blank at the last moment. But it is only by a lucky hazard that you can achieve this ; for more often than not the bird is silent once he has left his perch, and, even if he continues to play for a few minutes, his voice does not carry as it does from a tree, and his outline is hard to distinguish against the dark soil or amongst low vegetation.



CHAPTER X

ABOUT SALMON-FISHING

“Applying fears to hopes and hopes to fears,
Still losing when I saw myself to win !”

NATURAL history books tell us that the salmon, in his different varieties, is a widely distributed fish ; but it is not every angler who would expect to find him in Central Asia. No doubt at some remote geological epoch the Caspian was connected with the great oceans of the world ; for it is difficult otherwise to explain the presence in that land-locked sea of salmon which differ neither in appearance nor in habits from our own well-known fish. Scientifically, *salmo Caspicus* is not identical with *salmo salar*, though I am too ignorant to know the particular details which differentiate the two ; but from the point of view of the angler and the gourmet they are the same. They both take a “ Jock Scott ” when in the mood ; and they both, if given a fair chance, have the same characteristic taste and appearance on the table. The qualifying words are necessary in the case of *Caspicus* ; for often his presence at an official feast at Tehran was only too evident to the guests before the dish was set before them. But it is much to ask of any fish that he should be at his best after four days or so on mule-back.

Most angling diplomats in Persia contented themselves with the charming trout streams which water the upland valleys of the Elburz range ; but by the

middle of August the green freshness of the Lar valley has passed. The river retains its full volume ; but the herbage is withered, and little dust-devils, traversing the glen during the heat of the day, penetrate into the tents and make life comfortless with grittiness. It is time to contemplate a descent into the vapour-laden jungle through which flow the stretches of the river available to migratory fish. The contrast between the uplands and the Caspian belt has been described in another chapter, but not from the angler's point of view. To him the change is as distressing as it was to Bakhshiali ; for the clear banks of the Lar valley, where the veriest tyro can make a happy cast, are replaced by a tangle of vegetation which cramps the style of the greatest expert. And instead of cantering gaily along to his favourite water, rod in air, the fisherman must almost creep to his pool through the most infernal thickets of thorny bush. The river itself changes its character for the worse, and, from being clear and inviting, becomes turgid and repulsive, owing to constant rainfall on a heavy soil. Moreover, contrary to all the canons which should guide the conduct of rivers, the volume of water decreases as the sea is approached, owing to the many irrigation ditches which take off from the main stream.

It was due partly to these disadvantages and partly to the reputation for fever and sudden death enjoyed by the province of Mazanderan that I never gave the salmon-fishing a proper trial. There are not a few short rivers in the province, and it is quite possible that some of them are good. The best pools probably lie near the highest point the fish can reach, where the water is uncontaminated by the mud of the lower-lying soil. The stream I actually tried was a very modest one, and I only secured two small fish of five and three pounds—both on a “Jock Scott.” How big

they ran I cannot say, but I never saw one in the flesh over ten pounds.

But Caspicus is not the only Asiatic salmon to take a fly. In the middle of the nineteenth century, when the late Captain Blakiston resided in the north island of Japan, then called Yezo and now Hokkaido, salmon swarmed in the rivers of the island as they did in those of the coast of British Columbia on the opposite side of the Pacific. Then came the awakening of Japan and the growth of the commercial spirit. Canneries were started, and every kind of engine of destruction was introduced to keep them supplied with raw material. The inevitable result did not fail to follow, and, when I visited the island in 1907, the stock of fish had so decreased that the canneries had disappeared, most of the fixed traps had fallen into disrepair, and the angler had, to a modest extent, again come into his own.

Of the many thousands of tourists who annually visit Japan, few penetrate to Hokkaido. The journey is long, though quite comfortable, and there are in the island no famous towns or beauty spots, nor any of those marvellous temples and gardens which make the other islands so enchanting. Hokkaido is, indeed, distinct in every way from the rest of the empire. Geographically, it is separated from the other islands by a strait so deep and ancient that it forms one of the dividing lines of the world; and Blakiston's line marks the limit set by the forces of nature to the fauna and flora of the main group. North of that line the pheasant of the main island gives way to the hazel-grouse, the monkey disappears and the brown bear of Siberia replaces his smaller Japanese cousin. Climatically, too, Hokkaido belongs rather to the mainland of Asia, for the winter is long and rigorous, and there is a comparatively short, hot summer.

It is in Hokkaido that we find the last remnants of the aboriginal race, which has left so many place-names all over Japan. The hairy Ainu are gentle creatures, still worshipping their sacred bear with secret rites, but addicted to strong liquor and unfit to bear the struggle for existence in a civilised world. They were fast disappearing in 1907, and few of those who remained were said to be of pure descent. The Rev. J. Batchelor deplored their approaching extinction ; he had spent his life amongst them, compiled a dictionary of their language, and cared for their souls and their bodily welfare with true Christian loving-kindness. The Ainu do not strike the Englishman as extraordinarily hirsute ; and their reputation in this respect is probably due to their appearance being compared with that of the Japanese, whose facial hair is but scanty. The Ainu man, like Samson, scorns scissors and razor ; but the result is nothing more striking than a dark good-sized beard and a tangle of swarthy locks. The open shirt reveals a bosom not more closely covered than that of many Europeans. The ladies, anxious apparently to maintain the reputation of the race, tattoo the upper lip with the coquettish semblance of a little blue moustache ; a queer adornment said to rouse the amorous feelings of their admirers. Both sexes are darkish and small in stature, no bigger than Japanese ; but they are absolutely European in appearance, and there is no trace of the Mongol eyelid.

It was the famous big-game hunter, the late Major Cumberland, who roused our interest in the salmon of Hokkaido. He had been in the island several times and had had very good sport ; and it was in accordance with the indications he had generously given us that we set off from Tokyo in the middle of June. This is the pleasantest time in the north, for the forests are

still in their early freshness, and the stifling heat of mid-summer has not yet produced its attendant swarms of noxious insects. It was also said to be the best time for fishing; but in this we were to some extent disappointed, for, when we arrived on the banks of the Saru where the Major had been so successful, we found it a muddy torrent owing to heavy rains and the late melting of the snow on the high ground. For three days we waited on the banks, hoping and trying to persuade ourselves that the flood was clearing; but on the fourth morning it was obvious that the contrary was the case, so, as our leave was running out, we reluctantly struck our tents and determined to march along the coast till we found a likely stream.

The weather was fine as we faced due east along the shore, now riding, now walking for a change, the vast expanse of the Pacific shining on our right. The first day we passed nothing but insignificant streams, but the second brought us luck. We fell in with a friendly Japanese Christian who told us that, a little farther on, we should come upon a river, and that some four miles up the stream lived a well-to-do Ainu, a breeder of horses, who, adjoining his own dwelling, had built a small house as a lodging for dealers who came to purchase his stock. The house would certainly be put at our disposal, and our friend would show us the way till he found a guide. This was indeed putting Christian doctrine into practice; and our mentor was as good as his word, for he did not leave us till he had handed us over to an Ainu who knew the way.

The stream did not look too promising where we first saw it. The current was slack, and it had none of the characteristics of a salmon river. But the water was quite clear and the volume respectable;

so we left the coast road and struck through the thick oak forest along a muddy track. Just when we were getting doubtful about our guide's local knowledge, a clearing appeared, and in it a large hut with a doll's house, built in what is called in Japan "foreign style," a few yards away. The Ainu horse-breeder was from home, but his moustachioed spouse and daughters made us welcome to the two minute matted rooms of the guest house. And in one of them we immediately had tea ; for it was the sacred hour of five o'clock.

My two companions were British officers studying Japanese, and, as neither had any previous experience of salmon-fishing, the responsibility for conducting operations fell upon me. Having put up our rods, we hurried through the hundred yards of open wood which separated the doll's house from the river. The stream was about twenty yards broad on the average, though a good deal wider in some places and rather narrower in others ; and it turned and twisted through the forest in a series of alternating pools and rapids. In short, the Niikap, as it was called, was in every way a river to fill the angler's eye ; and we had not strolled far down the bank before I saw about a score of salmon lying at the bottom of a nice pool. Leaving one rod to attack them, I hastened off to find a promising spot for the other, and was soon at leisure to look after myself. When I returned just before dark, I found my companions a little downcast, doubtful indeed whether there were any salmon in the river. Fortunately, I had secured three fish, of which the largest weighed only four pounds.

I had only two more days' fishing, as I had to return to Tokyo, and secured ten fish in the two days, the largest weighing nine pounds and the smallest three. The river turned out to be full of variety, rocky pools

and rapids alternating with shingly streams and shallows. The banks were here high and impassable, there forest clad to the water's edge; and I particularly remember rising a fish under the shadow of a magnolia tree in full bloom. The sun shone uninterruptedly, but with no unpleasant ardour; and we supported without ill effects the continuous wading in very cold water. It would have been better to have had waders. An Ainu accompanied me one day, and it was amusing to see his obvious scepticism change to delighted astonishment when a fish was hooked. Before the day was over he had become quite a promising gaffer, in addition to being an amiable companion and willing bearer of burdens. *Salmo Japonicus*, "Masu" in the vernacular, seemed to me exactly to resemble *salmo salar* of the same size; though all these Pacific salmon are scientifically distinct from their Atlantic brethren. In any case *Japonicus* rose freely enough to the fly—rose in fact much more freely than he took; for cast after cast you could see him come up through the clear water and nose the fly without opening his mouth.

Looking back, I feel sure that I should have caught more with much finer gut and smaller flies. But in those days Mr Arthur Wood had not disturbed the equanimity of orthodox veterans by the success of his novel methods on the Dee; nor had he introduced us to the advantages of the greased and floating line and the tiny, scarcely submerged fly. The Niikap was probably an ideal stream for such as Mr Wood; and, were I to return there, I should certainly try to profit by his experience, though I could not hope to emulate his skill. It was said that the Masu only took a lure when quite fresh-run, and all those we caught were in their very prime. But it is possible that, in this respect, they differ little from our own fish, which

become stiffer and stiffer the longer they have left the sea. Later in the season, we were told, there was a run of much heavier fish which disdained every blandishment of the angler. These no doubt belong to one of those species of Pacific salmon which are rarely taken with rod and line in fresh water. So much for salmon-fishing in Asia.

Before the war there was hardly a salmon river in Norway that was not in the hands of Englishmen. Some owned the water, and not a few others had rented their beats for generations. The four years' struggle broke the tradition and habits of nearly a century; and, when it was over, there were wide gaps in the ranks of those who habitually passed their summers in Norway. Of the survivors, many could no longer afford the holiday; and many of the fishing rights passed into the hands of Norwegians who had, in the meantime, both learnt to appreciate the sport and acquired the means to pay the greatly increased rents demanded by the peasant proprietors. The changed conditions did not improve the fishing. Fixed engines of destruction reappeared in places which had long been free from them; and beats, which formerly were fished with moderation by one or two persons, were let at absurd prices, pool by pool, to a score, who flogged them day and night and dragged them with every kind of bait in order to try to get some of their money back. But time has its revenge. It is now the turn of Norway to feel the pinch of high taxation and industrial depression; and the Englishman is recovering his wind after the terrific tussle and is returning in greater numbers every year to his favourite valleys.

If you compare the rents paid in Scotland with those paid in Norway for salmon-fishing, you will find that, with important exceptions, the former work out

cheaper per pound of fish landed than the latter. This does not dispose of the question of the respective merits of the angling in two countries where conditions are entirely different. In Norway the whole business is compressed into a very short space of time. Instead of getting your rods out in February, it is useless to think of fishing before June, save in a few small rivers in the south ; and in many rivers it is not till after the middle of that month that fish run in any numbers. No sooner has the season begun than it seems over ; for, though many salmon are taken in August, they are then as red as in October at home ; and in the middle of September the season closes definitely in nearly all rivers. In these circumstances it is as natural that high rents should be asked, as it is that they should be reluctantly paid.

The system of land tenure has an important bearing on the whole question. In Scotland the rivers are mainly in the hands of considerable proprietors, who are able to provide lessees with beats of satisfactory extent, and whose pecuniary interests are best served by maintaining a high sporting reputation for their water. In Norway the fishing rights are owned by innumerable small farmers, some of whom do not possess more than a few yards of one bank. But these few yards include, perhaps, a rapid eminently suited for the placing of a fixed trap ; and this trap may well give its owner a considerable annual revenue from a bit of water quite worthless from the sporting point of view. It will readily be seen with what difficulties the arrangement of a fishing lease is accompanied. Months, and often years, of negotiation and of haggling with dozens of individuals are necessary before anything can be put on paper. In the old days the arrangement usually provided for the traps being taken off ; but nowadays this is too expensive, and they

are left to exasperate the angler by their deadly efficiency.

It is the same story with the netting. The configuration of the coast, with its countless islands and rocks, and its fjords penetrating deep into the heart of the country, affords ideal opportunities for the placing of fixed nets; and it is astonishing that any fish reach the rivers at all. It is true that the nets should be taken up for three days on end during the week (a period reduced to two days in 1927); but there are no adequate means of enforcing the law in this respect; and even if there were, the migrating fish take much longer than even three days to run through the danger zone. The result of all these factors is that the stock of salmon does not now approach that of former days; and many rivers are completely ruined both for angling and commercial purposes. The Norwegian authorities are alive to the loss of natural wealth which is being caused; but the question is complicated by political considerations, and present policy is directed rather towards replenishing the stock by means of hatcheries than to restricting capture. In some rivers the results appear not unpromising; and it is conceivable that, if sufficient money is forthcoming for running hatcheries on a really big scale, the stock of salmon may in time do better justice to the almost boundless possibilities afforded by the numerous magnificent and unpolluted rivers. But unless strong measures are taken soon, few Englishmen will continue to fish in Norway.

In spite of all this there are still some very good rivers in Norway and a number of others on which the modest sportsman can enjoy himself. I do not speak of a certain river in the far north, where catches in recent years have been fabulous, rivalling the sport of the middle of last century. That was the heroic

period of fishing in Norway, when two Englishmen, sailing up the coast on a voyage of discovery, inquired of the inhabitants at the mouth of a certain river whether there were any salmon in it and whether they might fish. Both questions were readily answered in the affirmative, and our two pioneers caught fifty-three fish the first day and thirty-six the second. The river now belongs to the son of one of them, and is still very good.

If quantity is no longer to be obtained, except by a privileged few, all who have fished in Norway will bear witness to the quality of the sport. Here we are on delicate ground; for quality is comparative, and we all know whither comparisons lead, especially when Scotsmen are involved. But at the risk of rousing a hornet's nest across the border, I will aver, calling credible witnesses on oath to confirm me, that a twenty or thirty pounder in Rauma or in Driva makes but a half-hearted creature of his counterpart in Spey. And to the sceptic I would put the pertinent question: Does your host or the head fisherman ask you anxiously, when you are putting up your rod before sallying out on the bank of the queen of Scottish rivers, whether you have two hundred yards of backing on your reel? Answer me that, my fine fellow. No prevaricating. Does he, or does he not, put to you that searching question? On your answer depends the national honour. You hang your head; you turn away; you cannot face the music.

I confess to being myself taken aback when my host asked me this question on my first arrival on a famous Norwegian river. I had enjoyed a week of fine sport on the Spey at the beginning of April the year before, and it had not occurred to me that my equipment would be pronounced deficient. However, on reflection, my friend considered that one hundred and twenty

yards of backing would probably suffice, since it was late in July and the fish had somewhat sobered down. He was right ; though I had not been fishing for a quarter of an hour before I had lost a twenty-pounder with half my backing out.

This extreme activity of heavy fish in Norway disconcerts at first the experienced British angler ; and I know one who, after having lost several fish owing to their having taken out an immoderate length of line, adopted too drastic methods, and was broken more than a dozen times in the course of the following week. It is only in June and the beginning of July that the fish are at their wildest. They then seem bent on returning to the sea at all costs. The procedure is usually the same. You hook your salmon a few feet or yards on your side of the main stream, where the water runs deep with no great speed ; and he begins by lulling you into a sense of security by swimming placidly about in the quiet water. After a very few minutes he tires of this, and works slowly but irresistibly out into the stream. Once well in the middle of the current he is off for the sea ; and, before you have time to think, a hundred yards of line are gone and the reel still screaming. This is a painful moment. Ten to one you have not seen your quarry and have no idea of his size save that he is a good fish. For the large rivers of Norway are not only much more rapid, but they are far deeper than at home ; and it is no uncommon thing to have a big fish on for twenty minutes or so without even a boil on the surface.

So there you are, connected ever more precariously with a fish which may prove the prize of your dreams, the supreme achievement of your angling existence, the envy of all your friends. And the capture of this possible monster depends on the decision of that very

moment. If you take alarm and do more than apply the gentlest brake on reel or line, he is gone for ever. Perhaps your irresolution saves you, and he stops of his own accord behind some great unseen boulder in the bed of the torrent ; and you are able to get ashore and advance on him, treading like Agag over the rocks and recovering your backing yard by yard ; till finally the first coil of the heavy line appears on the reel. I always look anxiously for the reappearance of the heavy line from the water, and when it has passed through the top ring of the rod and actually shows once more on the reel, I feel that the first crucial stage of the struggle is safely over.

If you are fishing from a boat or cannot follow the hooked fish save in a boat, as often happens, the case is more distracting still. There is a pool on the Driva where the fish regularly behave as above described, and you cannot follow them to the next pool on foot. Having lost a couple of good fish there, and my friends a couple more, I made up my mind to be after the next fish in the boat at once. But, when the moment came, it seemed such a business to get into the boat out of the deepish water I was wading in ; the boatman was clumsy, and the whole thing a mistake. In short, like so many statesmen and commanders in the field, I threw to the winds the well-considered plans matured during long hours of undisturbed contemplation of the problem, and fell a victim to irresolute opportunism when the moment for action came. On this occasion I got off cheaply, and did not lose another fish in the pool ; but the reason was that the season had advanced and the fish sobered down.

There are disadvantages in following a fish in a boat. The first is that, if the fish does stop in some hidden holt, you are bound to overrun him ; for there is no

question of being able to check the boat before the next pool. If you are very lucky, you may find the fish still on, when, having landed some way below him, you have reeled in the slack. But it is far more probable that the line does not tighten again. Moreover, the chances of the fish stopping are increased by your following him ; for the boat, racing down the stream, relaxes the pressure on the running fish and inclines him to halt. It may be, too, that someone later in the day wants to fish the pool from the boat ; and, as it probably has to be carted up stream again, it will not be available till next day if you take it down.

Finally, you may hook a fish where it is impossible by any means to follow him if he leaves the pool. This case seems simpler than the other two ; since, apparently, there is nothing for it but to hang on and trust to your tackle. But the man of decision and of iron nerve has another resource. He tears the line off the reel quicker than does the fish, and cures him of his madness by giving him a free rein. For, as we have just seen, a salmon often stops running when he feels no counter-pressure ; and I am assured by an angler of skill and credit that, by this heroic treatment, he has saved more than one good fish from certain loss.

The antics of an active fish soon wear him out, and a heavy salmon in a great Norwegian river does not take particularly long to land. It is reserved for the big sulky fish to try the angler's patience—the fish that finds a deep and quiet pool where he can resist sustained pressure by standing on his head at the bottom. It must have been such a one that defied the efforts of a posse of Norwegian anglers for forty-four hours on a stretch two years ago in the neighbourhood of Stavanger. I read of the matter in the

press at the time, and next year had the good fortune to meet the brother of the man who hooked this monster. I questioned him closely, as may be imagined, and was assured that the story was authentic. After some hours' play the original angler was relieved by a friend, and others came to his assistance as time went on. In short, regular watches were set, as on board ship; until at the end of forty-four hours the fish got tired of the game and sailed away. But my informant had not actually been present, and I could not make out positively whether the fish had ever been clearly viewed. I gathered, as indeed must have been the case, that he was quiescent during long periods; but I could get no convincing account of his general demeanour. Were the sportsmen really in touch with him all this time, perhaps with the line hitched round some impediment? Or had he, early in the day, neatly transferred the hook to a sunken log which finally shifted from its position and moved irresistibly down stream? These are questions which the reader must answer for himself.

There is no denying that, where fish average twenty pounds or so, as they not infrequently do in the larger Norwegian rivers; and where the angler is kept agog by the possibility of a fifty-pounder, the sport is on another plane to that in waters where the mean weight is only the half, and a twenty-five pounder is reckoned a monster. In Norwegian valleys everything that happens is known up and down the glen for twenty miles in a few hours. Perhaps the ubiquitous telephone has something to do with it; but I prefer to think that this instantaneous communication of important news rests on the age-long aptitudes of a highland people. Anyhow, it is no surprise to hear one morning that a fish the size of a porpoise has been tearing like a torpedo through the nets of the fjord, and

that a small boy last saw his boiling wake shooting up the mouth of your river. Since that moment he has been lost to human ken. He has not been taken in any of the river traps—he is too big for that—and he may now be resting in one of your favourite pools. Of course, you know you will not meet him. But you recall that, three years ago, a fish nigh on sixty pounds was actually caught; and you are stirred again by the classic description of how the trembling Ole lost the fish of the century for the late Mr Bromley-Davenport. In short, the story keeps you in good heart during a couple of blank days.

Such are the vicissitudes of salmon-fishing in Norway; and, if they were the only attractions peculiar to the sport in that country, they would suffice to bring British anglers over, so long as any fish remained to be caught. But to these must be added the change of scenery and environment, the novelty of perpetual light, and the society of an interesting and stalwart race. No one who has enjoyed them is likely to belittle the charms of a Scottish river; the peat-stained water, the soft atmosphere, and the harmonious colours are in their way beyond compare. But, to enjoy a change, it is not necessary to disparage what one has left; and no comparisons are so unprofitable as those between different types of scenery. The delicate shades and melting distances of the West Coast of Scotland; the glittering peaks and brilliant colouring of Switzerland; the vast spaces and subdued tones of Central Asia; the whispering rushes and wide mottled skies of East Anglia; the harmonious variety and fantastic details of Japan; the pearly outlines and indigo seas of Greece, each one of them—and of how many more?—has a supreme merit of its own, which can be appreciated for itself, but cannot be measured in a balance with a rival. It is in this spirit that you

can best enjoy the clear aquamarine depths and the furious rapids of a Norwegian river, the beetling cliffs of the valley which confines it, and the distant snow-covered tops which the pellucid atmosphere seems to bring within reach of your hand.



CHAPTER XI

A PHILISTINE FISHERMAN

"This is the rarest dream that e'er dull sleep
Did mock sad fools withal : this cannot be,"

WITH a groan of distress at my ignorance and a general feeling of despair for future success, I closed the latest book on dry-fly fishing, turned out the light, and rolled over to go to sleep.

I was to catch the early train next morning at Waterloo, and had been eagerly looking forward to the first day of the season on a Hampshire stream known to me from boyhood. In order to be thoroughly up to date I had prepared myself with a course of literature ; and the result was that the enthusiasm usually preceding the first day of the season was dimmed by dark misgivings. I soon fell into an uneasy slumber.

It was a perfect summer morning when I reached the door of the cottage I knew so well. A bright sun shone from a cloudless sky, and the lightest of zephyrs from the south hardly stirred the sedges ; the dew-drops hung like jewels from every blade of grass. The Major seemed hardly so genial as usual ; his clothes were cut to a more austere pattern, and his face was more closely shaved—in short, there was something priestly about his appearance which I had never noticed before.

We sat down to breakfast, and he remarked that the men would be ready at ten-thirty, before which

time there could be no proper rise in May. Something in his attitude prevented me from questioning him; I had never been accompanied before by a man, and he spoke of "men"; and usually we rushed out the moment our coffee was swallowed. Gravely we finished our meal.

At ten-thirty my rod was ready, with a blue quill fixed to the cast; and I stood waiting with my basket and net slung on my back. After looking me over with a critical and dissatisfied air, my host said that he did not really mind my rod having rings and fastenings which had long been proved to be inferior, or my net being a foot too short in the handle, but he must ask me to put on a longer cast. The weather was calm and bright, and a cast of less than four yards would keep the fish down for several days after its use. As for my blue quill, no fly at all like it had been seen on the water, and it would certainly scare the larger fish. Reluctantly I changed the cast and removed my favourite fly. This done, the Major looked at his watch and said it was time to start; he would take me to the men who would assist me and tell me of the rules of the stream. The rules were new, but absolutely necessary in view of the unsportsmanlike conduct of some of his guests, one of whom had recently killed as many as four brace of fish in one day.

We joined the men, whose appearance filled me with anxiety. They were dressed alike, something in the manner of German foresters, and wore the same severe ecclesiastical expression as their master, who introduced them to me as Dr Silas K. Black and Mr Jeremiah Q. Brown, Professors of Entomology and Biology in the University of Polioopolis, Pa. Brown carried three nets of different materials and sizes, and a large mahogany box; Black a prodigious basket,

with six compartments, and a telescope on a tripod; they both wore horn-rimmed spectacles. Wishing me a pleasant day, the Major left us.

The sight of the river filled me for a moment with the old boyish enthusiasm; and I spotted a rise before I even reached the bank. Forgetting my host's injunctions, I was just putting on my old friend the blue quill, when I felt a touch on my arm and saw a horrified expression on Brown's face; Black was engaged in embedding the tripod in the mud and focusing the telescope on the ring made by the rising fish. A fly came sailing by, and Brown deftly secured it in the smallest net made of white ramie fibre, with a telescopic handle capable of extending fifteen feet. The fly looked to me very like my blue quill; but Brown said it must be examined, and took out of the mahogany box a microscope, which he proceeded to adjust on a small platform. The fly was declared to be a female specimen of *Bætis Rhodani* in the sub-imago stage of development.

Completely bewildered, I asked to be allowed to try my blue quill; but the Professor said it was out of the question. Rule No. 6 distinctly laid down that no fish was to be caught except on the exact imitation of the fly upon which it was feeding. My blue quill did not fulfil that condition. Besides, it had not yet been ascertained what the fish was actually taking; it was more than possible that it was feeding on something different from the female of *Bætis Rhodani* in the sub-imago stage of development. Mr Jeremiah Q. Brown would soon settle this point.

The latter gentleman was now peering through the telescope in an attitude which, to me in my enraged condition, was an almost intolerable temptation to give a swinging spank. I refrained; he straightened himself, and stated that the fish was certainly taking

an insect similar to the one examined. My box revealed nothing which could be admitted under Rule No. 6; but the basket contained the imitation required, and at last I was actually casting over a rising fish.

The first cast was a little short; and it was not till I had made several more that the fly alighted satisfactorily, but was ignored by the fish. I was drying the fly preparatory to another effort, when the Professor arrested my arm and said decisively that the fish must now be left quiet. Rule No. 8 absolutely forbade "hammering"; and Rule No. 9 defined this process as casting more than six times over the same fish in ten minutes. I had already cast six times in much less than that period.

There was nothing for it, and we proceeded upstream. It was already past twelve, but fish were moving; and again we encamped below a good trout on the rise. The telescope was erected; but a prolonged gaze did not reveal the nature of the insect which was being taken, and we passed on. More flies were examined and correctly named by the Professor; but it was not till two-thirty that I again put my fly on to the water.

At the second or third cast the fly pitched right, but turned over on its side. The fish was just moving up to take it, when the rod was jerked up; and the Doctor reminded me, in a stern voice, that I was on a dry-fly stream. Rule No. 1 forbade the taking of trout by any means except the dry-fly; my fly was not properly dry, at any rate not cocked, and, had I landed the fish, I should have been bound to return it to the water and pay a fine of £1 for having infringed the rule.

The fish, of course, was scared; but we found another soon after, feeding on the male of the *Centrop-*

tilum luteolum in the final, or imago, stage. He was in an awkward place, as there were some high thorn bushes just behind me, and he was lying near the opposite bank. However, by stepping into the water, which was not deep, I could avoid the bushes without disturbing the trout. I had one foot already in the shallow, when the professors rushed at me together and dragged me out. Rule No. 10 forbade wading under any circumstances whatever; it ruined the spawning beds, disturbed the ephemeridæ and trichoptera in the nymph stage of development, and was altogether a most unsportsmanlike proceeding. The fish could easily be reached from the bank by the left-handed horizontal fore-switch cast, of which I was no doubt a master. I tried the fish from the bank and lost my cast in the bushes.

Under the circumstances I was not sorry when Dr Black pulled out his watch and said it was three-thirty, after which hour trout did not rise in May. There were several rising at the moment, but I was too dispirited to argue the point, and retired dejectedly to the house. We were met by the Major, who received a detailed account of the day's sport from the professors; one of whom had been taking shorthand notes during much of the day. The Major did not appear altogether pleased, and said that there was, of course, no evening rise so early in the year, and that the fish must absolutely have a rest the next day after having been disturbed in the way they evidently had.

I was just exploding into an outburst of fury when I felt my shoulder shaken, and heard the voice of my servant saying: "Time to get up, sir." Good heavens! Was it possible that it was all a nightmare? I tumbled out of bed and just caught the train. The wayside station and the drive were as

in my dream, but the Major received me with a shout. "Come on, old boy, we must hurry up over breakfast; you never know when the fish will begin to move."

I caught five brace that day on my blue quill.

M^*



CHAPTER XII

DRY-FLY FISHING AND WINCHESTER

"The pleasant'st angling is to see the fish
Cut with her golden oars the silver stream
And greedily devour the treacherous bait."

THE above lines go far to prove, what I have long suspected, that Shakespeare was an ardent dry-fly fisherman. If sceptics still shake their heads, they must admit that, if he was not himself an adept, his all-embracing genius took him as unerringly to the root of the matter in fishing as in all other fields of human activity. For it is just this seeing the fish greedily devour the treacherous bait, that makes dry-fly fishing the pleasantest angling. Wet-fly fishing may, and in my opinion does, demand fully as much skill and knowledge of fishing lore as the rival pastime ; but it can supply no incident of such supreme satisfaction and exhilaration as the view of a great trout advancing on the cocked fly and taking it into his open mouth. Occasionally, of course, when fishing wet either for trout or salmon, you see your quarry before he takes the fly ; but it is a rare occurrence, and this manner of angling relies for its charm on the subtle pleasures of touch rather than on the delight of the eye. Shakespeare is right ; dry-fly fishing is the pleasantest angling.

Forty years have passed since the time with which most of this chapter deals, and the two placid streams which introduced generations of Wykehamists to a

source of life-long enjoyment are now as bare of fish as any highroad. Pollution has done its work so thoroughly in the southern rivers that people have lost all conception of the stock an unpolluted chalk stream will carry. They are pleased if, by rigid restriction as to the size and number of fish caught, they succeed in maintaining a supply sufficient for a paltry four or five brace on a real good day; and sometimes this is only achieved by heavy stocking with mature fish. A few of the older generation still remember vast hatches of fly setting the whole river in a boil, but the younger ones have no idea of nature's bounty in this sphere.

The forgotten days of plenty were brought back to me when fishing a chalk stream not far from Petrograd—a stream very like the Itchen in size and character, with a typical water-mill providing a deeper stretch above it. This water had never before been fished with dry-fly; and great was the astonishment of the Imperial keepers to watch me wading and netting fish after fish. They stood open-mouthed on the bank, clad in green and gold, trying to catch, or to avoid with ambiguous movements, the larger fish which I hurled at them. But the astonishing thing about the stream was the number of trout. They were literally in shoals in the shallow water, and the difficulty was to avoid hooking a sprightly half-pounder with a fly intended for his more portly neighbour. There was no limit to the number one could have caught; and I soon left the lower stream for the deeps above the mill, where fish up to six or seven pounds could be seen. Such are the splendours of an unpolluted chalk stream.

Nor do the rivers of the grey-stone country fall far behind in possibilities; and the Gloucestershire Colne in my Oxford days was a wonderful sight when the

“fly was up.” This rise of the mayfly was the event of the year in the valley. Every one took a personal interest in it; and the porter at the wayside railway station would greet you with a grin and the remark that the fly had been up these three days. The river boiled with trout feeding till they could hold no more; ducks swam about shovelling into their bills the dead and dying mayfly on the surface; and the air throbbed with the quivering wings of insects and of all manner of birds, from the swooping swift to the clumsy house-sparrow, bent on the annual feast. Such riot could not last more than a few days, and it was followed by the inevitable lethargy of repletion. And if anyone would like to know more about this sweet district, let him read the late Mr Arthur Gibbs’ delightful book called “A Cotswold Village.” It will repay him.

The limestone country has had its devotees ever since the angling sage immortalised the Dove. My own experience of it in England is restricted to two very disappointing days; but in Austria I have been able to judge of its possibilities when unfouled by man. The years of war pressed terribly on the people of Austria Felix; and the wonder in 1920 was, not that the beautiful streams of Styria were short of fish, but that the starving population had left any living creature in them at all. And such is the recuperative power of nature when allowed fair play, that the year 1921 already showed a notable improvement on its predecessor.

It is difficult to imagine a more charming stream than the Upper Mürz, or one that tries more highly the skill of the dry-fly man. Not that the fish are abnormally shy; but there is a total absence of weed, which results in panic spreading like wildfire through the scaly ranks. The banks are in many places so overgrown that you must needs wade; and when they

are open, you are often forced into the water by a curious law which gives you the right to fish but not the privilege of treading the shore. The water is so clear that you can plainly make out the fish at great depths ; and in shallow stretches you can see every trout at a glance if the bank is high.

Perhaps you have surveyed such a stretch and seen several takable trout in it. Gently you let yourself into the water and proceed up-stream ; but just as you are getting within range, a wretched troutling darts from under your feet and spreads his silly fears to such purpose that every fish for a hundred yards ahead is on the move. There is nothing for it but to brave the farmer, and, making a detour, strike the river at another point.

Besides the trout, there was a fair stock of grayling in this stream ; but they are so capricious that it is usually exasperating to try long for them. One part of the river had but few trout in it, and I was casting over grayling most of the day. Not one could I hook, though several nosed the fly ; till about four o'clock in the afternoon, when suddenly, for no apparent reason, I took four of a pound each with consecutive casts and without moving.

On these excursions you are accompanied by a lad with a little barrel full of water, which he constantly changes. This is your creel ; and you will appreciate the arrangement when you get home to dinner ; for there is no sort of comparison between a trout killed just before he is put into the pot and one that has been dead even for one hour—not to speak of half a day. We all know in our hearts, though we breathe it not, that Hampshire trout are not quite what they should be on the table. They are good, of course—first-class in fact ; but not absolutely worthy of their appearance and of their home. The truth is that we have never

given them a chance; and if I am so inexpressibly lucky in my old age as to have fishing of my own in Avon, Test, or Itchen, I shall introduce the Austrian manner and surprise the countryside by being followed along the banks by a boy, or possibly a girl, staggering under the weight of a cask. And this brings us back to Winchester.

When I went to school in 1885, the quality of the College water had already begun to deteriorate. It is situated just below the town, and was naturally among the first stretches of the Itchen to feel the effects of pollution. I do not think anyone could then have equalled the baskets made a few years before by Lord Grey of Fallodon; they certainly could not have done so in 1890, when I left school. But there were still plenty of fish in the river, and good ones too. I remember a boy catching one of five pounds in the stream just below the College Mill, though it is true that the victim fell to the lure of some illegal bait. And I once watched Charles Doughty, later Major Doughty Wyllie, V.C., most gallant of Wykeham's sons, land half a dozen trout of over a pound each in a few minutes on a live minnow in the mouth of the big drain just below Gunner's Hole. He was clad in light attire, and fled with his booty into the sanctuary of the bathing-place on the approach of authority.

I shall never forget my first sight of a trout. Always a keen fisher, my lines had been cast hitherto amongst the slimy inhabitants of East-Anglian pools; pike, perch, roach, bream, and eels I was familiar with, and had passed many hours of the holidays watching a float on the still waters of a weedy pond. The butler had given me my first lessons in the handling of worms—butlers seem to take as naturally to fishing as they do to making the best brands of ginger-beer—and later I had been promoted to the company of my

brothers. I had read of trout, but looked upon them as the rarest of British fishes, only to be found in the most favoured waters and to be caught by experts born under a more fortunate star than mine, and endowed with natural qualities I could never hope to acquire. For boys are determined believers in the immutability of natural qualities ; and it never entered my head as possible to compete successfully, either in school or in games, with those more receptive or skilful than myself. They were a race apart, "jigs" we called them in our slang, a kind of supermen, whose superiority was as unquestioned as the march of the sun and gave rise to as little envy.

It will be readily understood that, on the day of my arrival at Winchester, I eagerly jumped at my brother's suggestion to have a look at the river. We hurried down towards St Cross, and splashed cautiously across the water-meadow. The river lay before us, in the month of April, gliding smooth and clear as crystal, bank-high over its white bed, the long weeds waving slowly in the stream. With bulging eyes I peered into its depths, and, guided by my brother's finger, spotted my first trout. He lay in mid-stream, a good pound fish, every spot on him showing in the sun, and his tail was actually moving. I gasped with excitement, and nearly tumbled in, trying to get a better view. I wished to rush off and fetch a rod ; heedless of the fact that he was not even in the College water, and little realising that a charge of dynamite was my only hope of ever getting him on the bank. My brother explained matters, and we continued our inspection ; more fish were seen, and I returned to my house the happiest new-boy that ever went to a public school, and with a love of the Hampshire streams which the passage of years and long absences abroad have only served to increase.

I cannot say that my fishing at school was a success from any point of view but that of enjoyment. Apart from the deterioration of the College water, which was most noticeable after I acquired a modicum of skill, I started not only as a novice in the art of dry-fly fishing, but absolutely ignorant of fishing with a fly at all. And so unacquainted was I with the effects of flowing water, that I distinctly recollect "playing" the wooden sheathing of a hatch hole for some minutes, before realising that the fly was fast in the boards and that it was the current of the stream that gave life to my line. In these circumstances it is not surprising that my first two seasons were blank as regards takable fish, though not as regards fish taken, for I did secure one half-pounder my second season, and knocked him quickly on the head. I remember, even now, the surprise at his succumbing to a single blow; I had been accustomed to consider the struggle with pike or perch as only just beginning to be serious when the fish flopped into the boat.

It took me four years to realise that the middle of the day was the best time for dry-fly fishing in May and June. I was obsessed with my bottom-fishing experience, and, even in my last half, used to climb out of the house at 4 a.m. and spend three hours on the banks of the Itchen before early school, in the company of a kindred spirit from another house. Those mornings were divine—not a human being about, and all sorts of shy birds to be seen and comparatively unsuspicious. A whole brood of wild ducks were often just below the school bathing sheds, and dabchicks kept popping up in places where they were never to be seen in the day.

We used to tramp back to our houses to change our boots before going down to "morning lines." If we arrived a few minutes early half the "men" were still

in bed; and we roused the sluggards and made ourselves heartily loathed by our breezy and wideawake voices. But we did not remain wideawake long ourselves, and slept almost continually during school hours for the rest of the day. It was quite a favourite joke for the "don," in whose division I was by far the oldest inhabitant, and therefore somewhat privileged, to close my Cicero or Euripides without my knowing it, and put me on to construe after returning to his desk. The joke never palled; for the victim invariably sprang to his feet, and after an exchange of side kicks with his neighbour, outraged by the unjust suspicion of having shut the book, tried to pretend he knew the place. These early morning excursions were, of course, quite fruitless; we never saw a fly on the water; no self-respecting dun would be out at such an hour, nor would an Itchen trout look at him if he were.

Dry-fly fishing has of late been discussed in several good books and in innumerable articles in magazines, and it is no longer shrouded in the mystery with which early devotees succeeded in enveloping it. There is, indeed, no mystery at all; and any really good wet-fly fisherman will catch more fish on a dry-fly after a few days than many a high and dry purist after the same number of years. The reason is that the purist is so taken up with the technique of his art that he loses sight of the essentials of the sport; the other, on the contrary, is above all a fisherman, accustomed to seeing fish on the bank, and skilful enough to adapt himself to his altered conditions.

Nothing is more surprising than success or failure in dry-fly fishing. One man appears to the eye the most finished expert conceivable, his line goes out straight as a die and falls as light as thistledown at an astonishing distance; he matches the fly on the water to the nicest shade, and is equipped down to a

special fly-net, to be got at any first-rate tackle-shop for a mere trifle of thirty shillings (ten shillings extra for our patent nickel mayfly tweezer). Another man appears to throw but a moderate line, his fishing generally lacks the finish of his rival's, and his outfit is almost Turkish in its simplicity ; yet, day after day all through the season, he will return with double or treble the number of trout in his creel. Almost every regular fisherman has met these two types and been puzzled to explain the failure of the one and the success of the other ; he ends by concluding that the apparently richly endowed sportsman is one of those individuals who never get their share of the shooting.

Beginners, as a rule, exaggerate the importance of skilful, and especially of long, casting, and don't thoroughly realise what constitutes effectiveness in this branch. A reasonable degree of skill in casting is, of course, essential to success. If you cannot cast, you cannot catch trout with a dry-fly, any more than you can play polo well if you cannot hit the ball ; but neither casting nor hitting the ball is anything like half the game. It is certainly more useful to cast a short line really well than a long one moderately ; and lightness is incomparably more important than length. Straightness, so much admired by the tyro, is often a positive disadvantage ; for there are circumstances in which a light wobbly line, almost of the smoke-jack order, will rise a fish which a straight line would terrify by a drag. Some of the townsmen who fished the College water at Winchester threw the straightest and longest of lines, with the fly going in like a buck-shot at the end. I admired their style beyond anything, and modelled myself on it to the best of my ability ; with the result that to this day I find it easier to cast a long line than a really short one.

Perhaps the greatest secret of success is the know-

ledge of what fish to attack. It is this knowledge, coupled with real keenness and energy, which is the main explanation of the success of the apparently moderate fishermen. When a number of trout are rising, the knowing eye spots at once which is most likely to take his fly. He is not led astray by an obvious rise in mid-stream, but settles down to the siege of a good fish who has emitted a single bubble in an almost unapproachable little bay amongst the rushes. He knows that this fish will probably take his fly if it is properly presented, while the other is almost sure to ignore it.

It is a vexed question whether, during a rise, a fish should be made the subject of a prolonged attack, or whether it is better to pass on to another after the fly has been presented well half a dozen times, or even less. Both schools of thought embrace very successful fishermen; and it is probably a matter of temperament rather than of reason to which school one belongs. For my own part I find it physically impossible to tear myself away from a good fish properly on the rise, until I have either frightened him out of his wits or got him on the bank. I can never believe that I shall not have him next cast; and if, perchance, I do, the feeling of triumph more than compensates for the half-hour, or even longer, of toil and monotony. The two best fish I ever caught on the Itchen were taken one afternoon after a defence worthy of Todleben; they weighed three and a quarter and two and three-quarter pounds respectively, and must each have surveyed the fly well over a hundred times before they made a mistake.

But whether it is a good thing or not to lay these long sieges, there can be no doubt that it is useless to patrol the stream like a stockbroker on the London to Brighton road. Yet in the quiet valleys of the

Test or Itchen, it is no uncommon sight to see a man with a rod, apparently a fisherman, doing his four miles an hour along the treacherous bank; taking carriers and small fences in his stride, and preceded by a wave like the wash of some distant liner. At the end of the day he has found his beat too small, the fish too shy, and the rise too scanty; while his neighbour, who has moved only a few hundred yards all day, has a good basket.

Another vexed question, so vexed indeed that one hardly dares mention it, is that of flies. This is a subject that men wax really hot about; it raises the same kind of obscure passions as responded once to the theological disputes of the Byzantine period and to the present-day arguments as to the best size of shot to be used in a twelve-bore gun. I have seen a healthy man threatened with a fit of apoplexy at hearing some one refer to Sir Herbert Maxwell's well-known experiment with scarlet mayflies. Anyone holding heterodox views on this question will do wisely to keep them to himself unless he knows his company well; otherwise he may avoid open violence, but he will hardly escape any milder expression of contempt and disgust. But a writer has advantages; no one can even throw his book at his head unless he buys it first—a consoling thought which even a publisher can appreciate.

How much fish can see and detect under water still remains doubtful, though some very interesting experiments reported in the *Field* tend to show that, always provided a fish and a human being possess the same kind of sight, a trout can, under certain conditions of light, see the colours of a fly. The extremists, therefore, who concluded from Sir Herbert Maxwell's experiment, and their own experience in observing objects against a high light, that fish were virtually

colour-blind as far as flies were concerned, have received a shock. But the old-fashioned party, who assumed that fish could make out every colour under ordinary day conditions, find their position also somewhat shaken. The result is that, for once in a way, the moderate man looks like coming into his own. But, even if the fish is capable of distinguishing colours, it does not at all follow that his intelligence enables him to argue that, because a particular fly is not the exact colour of the natural fly then on the water, it is therefore inedible.

The divergency of view as to the seeing power and intelligence of trout finds its natural reflection in the fly boxes of the partisans. The out-and-out believers in both—the stake and faggot brigade, in short—carry a provision of both sexes and all stages of every variety of ephemera which is known on dry-fly waters. They are equipped with the net already mentioned, which tends to usurp the functions of the rod; and carry in addition a special pair of binoculars to detect any errant dun that may be unwary enough to show. They believe that the exact image of the natural fly then to be seen must be found; their own artificial is therefore rarely on the water at all, because it is continually in the process of being changed for one a shade greener, a trifle darker, or a thought smaller.

Whether these votaries catch much or little, there can be no doubt that they have a source of pleasure and interest which is not shared by the stalwart—the avowed atheist of the dry-fly world—who believes neither in the intelligence nor the colour-seeing power of the trout, and who carries in his box one or two varieties of fly, in perhaps two sizes. The ordinary man has the wishy-washy views of the half-hearted agnostic; he does not much believe in the discrimination of the trout, but he carries a fair selection of flies

in his box in the same sort of spirit as he occasionally goes to church on Sunday. Most of them he never uses, except on days when no fish is to be caught by any fly, and he sticks to some half-dozen favourites, on which he rings the changes.

I have endeavoured to form my own views on this all-important subject solely by the light of personal experience, and am, therefore, unable to say whether fish see colours or what exact amount of intelligence they possess. In early days I considered the finding of the "right fly" as of transcendant importance, and never failed to inquire of any fellow-fisherman on the College water what fly he had on. If only the "right fly" could be found, I believed that success was absolutely assured; the fish were, in fact, as good as cooked, whether they were rising or lying like stones at the bottom of the river. For one whole season I used hardly anything but a "hare's ear," because I secured my first good fish, a beauty of one and three-quarter pounds, on a fly of that pattern. To this day I am not sure whether I ever saw him rise before he was hooked. Several trout were rising in the fast water twenty yards below the school bathing-place, and I was distinctly vague as to the exact position of my fly when it fell. But the fish was landed right enough by my favourite "socius" in bird's-nesting and catapulting expeditions; he was no fisherman, but handled the net more coolly and surely than many a professional I have met since.

Since those days I have used fewer flies year by year; and, the last two seasons which I have fished in Hampshire, I have put on hardly anything but a red or a grey quill, though I still carry others in my box. One thing is quite certain, that a change of fly will often secure an otherwise recalcitrant fish. Often have I fished for twenty minutes or so for a fish with-

out getting a rise, and had him first cast with a new fly. But the change with me takes the form of a smaller or a larger size—either will do on occasion; and I am not sure that a mere change of the individual fly is not all that is required, and that another of the same size and pattern would not do equally well. All that is clear to me is that the trout knows that there is something wrong with that particular fly and will not take it.

There is, moreover, a moral aspect to this question which cannot be overlooked. The first condition of success is a recognition of one's own errors and a stern resolve to fight against the insidious tendency to blame everything for failure except oneself. No doubt men of tough moral fibre can regard the identity of the fly at the end of their cast as important, and still preserve the power of discerning and blaming their own shortcomings; but weaker vessels would do better to make up their minds that the fly is of little consequence, and thus eliminate from the outset the usual scapegoat for bad fishing—they will still have more excuses than they need. It is notorious that men who have drunk too much in their youth had better take the pledge; and I rest content in the belief, perhaps erroneous, that I catch as many fish as anyone who is not obviously a better fisherman than myself.

Nowadays the Hampshire valleys do not lack for admirers; but surely to no one do they make quite the same appeal as to an Englishman who has spent long spells abroad in wild and uncouth countries. To such a one the homely beauty of the cottages, with their gay flowers beside the well-kept roads, the rich water-meadows, and the lazy cattle beneath the tall trees, all speak of hundreds of years of settled government and peaceful pursuits. The very river, too, brimful on the hottest day at the end of a long drought, has an

air of certainty and security which no torrent can share. He hears the familiar tones of the country people amongst the hay, the drumming of the snipe in the soft air, and the cries of the well-known birds from sedge and willow ; and it seems to him that this indeed is the England of his devotion. When June comes round in a distant land, I conjure up a certain broad reach of the Test : the sinking sun shines right down the river and throws long shadows from a row of old oak posts, which mark a forgotten ford ; the rushes in the little bays are already in shadow and cut like steel the glassy surface of the water, which is broken here and there by a widening ring ; the swifts are still hawking in the golden air ; and in mid-stream stands a familiar figure, the companion of many a happy day in the beloved valley.

THE END

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